



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



3 3433 07494502 7

1751



7

NCW

Caine
b.

1751





MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

By WILLIAM CAINE

AUTHOR OF "THE STRANGENESS OF NOEL CARTON"

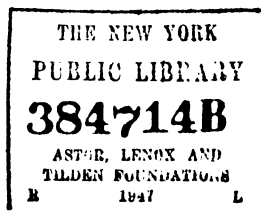


G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1922

Handwritten initials:
K
P

Handwritten:
NCL
Caine



Copyright, 1922

by

William Caine

Made in the United States of America

PROPERTY OF
THE
NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY



MAR 9 1922

F

Mendoza and a Little Lady

4 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

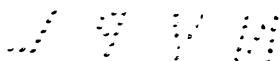
He required a good light in order the better to examine, through the big round magnifying glass which he held in his right hand—the pen drawing which he held in his left hand—the pen drawing which caused him to praise God.

It was done on a large sheet of fine Bristol board in black ink. It represented a lady in bed. The lady was very small and the bed (in comparison with the lady) was very large; about one part lady to ten parts bed was the formula. She lay among innumerable cushions, sipping from a cup. Beside her on a hexagonal table stood a tray with a curiously shaped jug, presumably of chocolate, and a dish of cakes. She was extremely beautiful and exquisitely elegant. On either side of her the bed-curtains fell to the floor from a corona in the ceiling. The bed and the corona were elaborately lacquered. The curtains were elaborately brocaded. The cup was elaborately painted. All the designs were different and clearly perceptible. The lady's cap was a miracle of laundered lace. In the dish were six cakes.

The size of this drawing was five inches by four. It was signed "Ottilie."

The Righteous Man had but one eye of flesh. The other was made of porcelain—an admirable match, however. Many people supposed it to be real; a trifle stiff perhaps. The Righteous Man had taken great pains and spent a lot of money over this porcelain eye. He valued himself on his appearance, did the Righteous Man.

Not without cause.



He was vast, to be sure; six feet one inch tall and exuberantly fat; three chins like sandbags under his collar and a stomach like a barrel's (which is all stomach). But he was undeniably handsome, with his straight fine nose, broad brow, well-cut mouth and abundant, wavy, yellow hair. He had done right to take trouble and spend money over his porcelain eye. It was a lovely blue. So—since it was a perfect match—was the other.

And now through this other, and with the aid of his loupe, the Righteous Man studied the small pen and ink drawing of a lady in bed.

With his one real eye this person could size up a pen and ink drawing as well as any man alive; or for that matter an etching, an engraving, a water-colour, an oil painting, a piece of glass, a bit of furniture, a jade, an ivory or aught else that is bigoted and virtuous. He loved all such things and his house was stuffed with them. He loved these his possessions for their value, which increased daily, since he had acquired each of them for a song. Unless he could get a thing for a song he always let it alone. To have to pay a fair price for a beautiful thing robbed it at once, in his sight, of all desirableness. But because he knew more than most people of certain matters he had, in the course of his forty-nine years of life, been able extensively to gratify his passion—perhaps the noblest of all the passions—for buying priceless bric-à-brac cheap.

Presently he put drawing and glass softly down upon the table at which he sat. Then he pushed

6 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

back his chair and slapped his two fat knees with his two fat hands simultaneously and spoke.

"Yes," he said, "a find! A find, by Jupiter!"

He opened a drawer in the table and took out a box of long, thin and very excellent cigars. One of these he lit and, leaning back, smoked for some minutes, with his eye fixed upon the drawing.

He pulled out his watch from his fob pocket. It was an old Regency turnip, gold and with a curiously wrought face, and it had a bunch of three seals, each a masterpiece of gem-cutting, attached to it by a broad ribbon of black watered silk. Upon all this he had spent, in various sums, at various times, and with various pawnbrokers and small jewellers, the sum of three pounds ten shillings and fourpence halfpenny. As it lay in his hand what was visible of the combination was worth one hundred and thirty guineas, or a little more or less.

The works of the watch were modern and had cost him forty pounds; but the works don't come into our estimate, which refers alone to the case and seals. He had bought the case empty of its original or any works. Had the original works been present, he would assuredly have let them lie; for they would have added a good hundred pounds to the value of his purchase.

"Just a quarter to twelve," he murmured. "Good! She should be here soon." And he continued to smoke.

A maidservant came in. "Can you see Mr. Mendoza, sir?" she asked.

"Yes," said the Righteous Man.

II

A moment later Mr. Mendoza was announced. He was small and dark and very quiet; he wore a suit, admirably cut, of navy blue serge, a black bow tie rather bigger than is quite proper, a slouch hat of black felt and very brilliant tan boots. Under one arm he carried a broad, flat artist's portfolio.

This Spaniard has been living in London now for two years.

He had arrived from Paris (where for the past twenty years he had made his headquarters) with a prodigious reputation and had taken his place at once. He could have earned ten times the money he did—and this was not a little—had he been willing to work like a horse; but he did not care to work like a horse because he did not believe that that is the way for a man to do his best. When he drew he distinguished rigidly between cartloads and caricatures—in which he specialised.

He followed his fancy. No editor could be sure of getting a Mendoza drawing for his magazine. No Captain of Industry might say: "I will put out a Mendoza poster." There was always an essential preliminary—that the Spaniard should have agreed. No one could say that he had Mendoza in his pocket, for no money could buy him if his fancy was not engaged.

Not that he worked fitfully. He worked incessantly. But if, for example, he was drawing slums out of doors for his own amusement, until the impulse to draw slums out of doors for his own amuse-

8 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

ment should leave him it was a thousand to one that he would decline to undertake any sort of commission. Yet one never knew. Success was always possible. The proposal might say something to him, whisper some happy idea; and then he would drop his slumming (or what not) at once and resume money-making. He refused work, now because he disliked the way it was offered, now because his mood was for a pen picture-story and a coloured poster was wanted, again because he was busy on an etching.

Another man would have ruined himself by such ways. Mendoza only increased his fame and the number of people who hunted him. But then, there was only one Mendoza. He knew it and made precisely what use of the knowledge he pleased. That editor put a feather in his cap who secured a piece of Mendoza's work. To publish him with any regularity set a periodical on high in the sight of men.

He could have sold everything he made; but not everything he made satisfied him. He destroyed much more than he preserved. What pleased him he sent out into the world, to such periodicals as he wished to have it. He was connected with no one magazine, with no one country. He was Mendoza.

He could have known Everybody had he cared about it. He didn't care about it. The rôle of lion did not appeal to him at all. He knew the people he wanted to know, not the people who wanted to know him. He did not aspire to be taken up and run for a winter and then dropped. He

preferred to begin with the dropping and that he should do it. The Hostesses had by this time given him quite up; they set their snares now for more likely prey. They hated him, because he had not answered their invitations, and spoke ill of him; but they did not say that he had not answered their invitations. They said that one really had to draw the line somewhere. Thus they accounted for his non-appearance at their enormous parties.

Mendoza's friends did not give enormous parties. The majority of them, indeed, were not by way of giving parties at all. He had a strange fondness for lame dogs, back numbers, misfires, and ne'er-dowells. Successful persons were apt to jar upon him. At times, because he was successful, he jarred upon himself; at such times he drew comfort from the reflection that he was not nearly so prosperous as he might be. He concealed his prosperity as much as he could. He lived in Chelsea at the top of a tall house near the Embankment. Five rooms, he had—a big attic-studio in which he worked and ate; a bathroom, a kitchen, his own bedroom, and another for Anfitrion, his factotum, an Andalusian like himself, acquired in Paris—an ex-lame dog, a person who would have cheerfully cut off all his legs and arms and his head to boot if such a proceeding would have been of the smallest service to his employer.

But we need not linger over this dapper little gentleman's antecedents. This is a story, not a biography.

Let the story proceed.

III

Mr. Albert Punchester rose to receive his visitor. He advanced ponderously, holding out both hands. "My dear friend," he exclaimed. "How delightful! The very man I wanted to see. Sit down. A cigar? A gin and bitters?"

"A cigarette," said Mendoza, as he took a chair and produced a pouch and some papers. His long yellow fingers became busy; miraculously the cigarette sprang into existence between them. He lit it, exhaled tobacco. "Well?" he inquired. "How do we go?"

"We go charmingly, Mendoza. I have five more pulls for you. They came in just now. The George Barnes, the Marie Peto, the Henry Roleston, the Robert Finch and the Brothers Kolinski. All are good except the Roleston. You won't like it. And perhaps the Marie Peto as well." He opened a drawer in his writing-table and handed a parcel to Mendoza. For some minutes Mendoza examined in silence the proofs which it contained.

"Yes," he said at last, "the Roleston is rotten. It must be done again. The Marie Peto is only pretty so-so. I am afraid it won't do. The others, Punchester, I pass."

"Yes," said Mr. Punchester, "I had my doubts of the Marie Peto. You've confirmed them, Mendoza. I'll tell Marlow that it must be done again. I'm glad you like the others."

"They are very good," said Mendoza. "I will say this much for you, Punchester—you have a

conscience about reproductions. Another man would have tried to make that Marie Peto do."

"Yes," said Punchester, "and wrecked the whole album. You're right, Mendoza, I might have lost less money on *The Useless Magazine* if I could have brought myself to make things do; but then *you* wouldn't have let me have this album for our Autumn Supplement. You see, virtue does sometimes get more reward than the consciousness of itself. One doesn't build up first-class magazines by making things do. *You've* never made things do, Mendoza. Result—you're the boss caricaturist of your day, unassailable, unique. *I've* never made things do. Result——" he bowed—"The *Useless* enjoys the privilege of publishing your Album of Theatrical Celebrities. What though I lose five hundred pounds——"

"You won't," said Mendoza.

He opened his portfolio. "Here," he said, "are three extra drawings I want to put in—Charles Owen, Oscar Bush and Funny Numps. I believe I've made the Numps sufficiently pathetic."

"It's a miracle," said Punchester, "it's only just not quite so miraculous as the Owen. The third is libellous, I should say, but I'll risk it. What a gorgeous monster! It would be a crime to suppress it. I shall have to apply for police protection or send dear Oscar a thousand free copies of the autumn *Useless*."

It was a perfectly open secret that *The Useless Magazine* and Punchester were one, though ostensibly there was no connection between them. Mar-

12 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

low, the editor, did precisely what Punchester told him; but Punchester very seldom appeared in the office. Marlow either called at Queen Anne's Gate for orders or received them over the telephone wire. Punchester owned the whole concern and was supposed to make a very good thing of it; though this he would never admit.

"I don't run *The Useless*," he was wont to say, "in order to make money, but if what I lose over it here on earth isn't made up to me later on I shall be very much disgusted. The man who, in this materialistic age, gives his cash to finance a High Class Magazine, and his brains to make it as fine a production as he can—such a man should be able to count on a comfortable hereafter. He need not concern himself too much if his yearly balance is found on the wrong side as often as not. I publish, *en amateur*, with the single object of encouraging good painters and writers. I am rich through no fault of my own, but I don't propose to allow my acquisitive old grandfather to pull me into hellfire without a struggle. I should be a big fool to grudge money (which I can well afford) to *The Useless*, when it is on *The Useless* that I shall found my claim to admission up above."

Thus half bantering, but with a perceptible undertone of seriousness, Punchester loved to talk.

Nevertheless it was the general opinion that his amateur publishing paid him very nicely. It was hard for people, who at all knew their Punchester, to persuade themselves that he looked beyond the tomb for a return upon any of his investments.

The Useless Magazine, now nine years old, was unquestionably a fine production. It came out on the first of every month and published, each quarter, a supplement which illustrated the work of some famous artist not of The Nucleus. Mendoza's Album of Theatrical Caricatures was to be one of these supplements.

Punchester had built for success upon the staunch foundation of a Nucleus. This Nucleus consisted of twelve artists and twelve writers. Quality, not name, was what Punchester had gone for, and he had got it. The man's judgment was extremely sound and he made very few mistakes. With what the public wanted he didn't concern himself; he published what he, Punchester, wanted, and he published nothing else. He began with twenty-four young and unknown men. Because they were unknown he got them cheap and he got them on long agreements. Because they were all very clever *The Useless Magazine* made its mark from the first. Every month it published precisely twelve drawings and precisely twelve pieces of writing. Each member was under contract with Punchester to provide him with twelve contributions annually and he had to satisfy Punchester every time. The magazine had a new cover every month. The artists took it in turns to design these covers, and the numbers were distributed among them by lot, the Christmas number excepted. So far Punchester had never let any man do more than one Christmas cover.

Since Punchester published only what he wanted to publish and since it was good, the public soon

discovered that it wanted it too. Not the Great Magazine Public, which gluts itself happily month by month on the photographs of actresses and crook stories and articles about the Lure of Broadway and life on The Other Side and strong serials by Mrs. This, Sir That, and Mr. the Other; but the public which values itself, the public which thinks it knows What's What in Art and Letters, the public whose houses stand within their own grounds in Weybridge and Altringham and Kelvinside and similar places. In short, the cultured public. *The Useless Magazine* cost half-a-crown each month; nevertheless it was to be found on all the cultured drawing-room tables. It had to be. The drawing-room table on which it was not to be found was, simply, not cultured.

If Punchester got his men cheap, he gave them an advertisement of astonishing value. Within a couple of years of the publishing of his first number all their names had become household words wherever Culture raises its horrid head. So they prospered prodigiously, selling plenty of their pictures to the cultured and lots of their writings to the publishers and editors who catered for the cultured; and most of them stuck to *The Useless* like limpets, never failing to send Punchester of their best. Very rarely one of them (drunk with success) would get tired of Punchester's rate of pay, and, when his contract came to an end, resign. Punchester never tried to keep such an one by raising his rate. He let him go and filled up his place in the Nucleus with some unknown, who immediately became

famous. There was never any difficulty about that. Why, there were scores of the not-at-all-unknown who would have been only too pleased to get on to *The Useless* and work for nothing.

Or perhaps another of the band would begin to send Punchester what was not quite of his best. With such an one Punchester had a short way. He warned him once and he warned him twice, and then he sacked him and filled up his place. But these defections and dismissals happened very seldom. Of the original twenty-four there were at the end of nine years fifteen still busily working for Punchester, and of the nine who were gone death had taken five.

IV

"Yes," said the Righteous Man reflectively, "these additional are beyond price. Nevertheless I imagine that they have one. Now the thing that occurs to me, Mendoza, is this. I have set aside a certain sum to meet the cost of this Album. This sum allows only for the twenty-one caricatures which you have supplied. These three——"

Mendoza got up. "These three," he said, "will make the two dozen. To me, for the purposes of this Album, two dozen and twenty-one are all the same. I have agreed my price. You have nothing to worry about, Punchester. And as to——"

"You mean that you throw these three in?"

"Of course."

"You are a most extraordinary fellow, Mendoza. But I accept—naturally, and with great gratitude."

16 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"Yes," said Mendoza, "I am extraordinary. I am Mendoza. But I am not extraordinary because I keep to my price. That is just common honesty, Punchester. I want to have twenty-four drawings in the Album instead of twenty-one. It is I that am obliged to you for accepting the extras. They will cost you some money to reproduce. I need not say, I hope, that I was quite willing to find that money, if you had wished it."

"My dear fellow," Punchester protested. He regretted nevertheless that he had been quite so precipitate.

Mendoza tied up his portfolio. "Then that is settled," he said. "Good-bye." He never lingered in the society of Punchester, whom, though he admired his ability and conscientiousness as a publisher, he detested.

Just then the maid came in.

"A Miss Wigmore to see you, sir, by appointment," she said.

"Ask Miss Wigmore to come in," said Punchester. Then, turning to Mendoza: "You must wait," he said. "Something that may interest you, I believe. At any rate, she draws things like this." He took the picture of the lady in bed from the window table and put it into Mendoza's hand. While Mendoza examined it Miss Wigmore was announced.

There entered a tiny and delicious creature; a girl perhaps eighteen years old, perhaps not; under five feet; slim as a willow; rounded, nevertheless, as to her outlines; with much brown shining hair, huge hazel eyes, a complexion of cream and roses, lashes

of an absurd length, a little impertinent nose, a large red mouth, a determined chin. She was dressed all in black, save for a pair of perfectly new elbow-length white kid gloves and the white silk stockings that showed between skirt and dazzling patent leather shoes. Her small black hat was nailed to her head with one big round ivory pin. In one hand she carried a black silk parasol with a long ivory handle. In the other she carried a portfolio of bright scarlet morocco leather. Her handbag was of black silk with an ivory frame.

"She might be one of her own drawings, begad!" Punchester thought, obviously enough.

Miss Wigmore had meanwhile come to a halt a pace or two from the door, and stood poised, with her head a trifle on one side. A birdlike attitude.

"Which," she asked in a clear voice, "is Mr. Punchester?"

Punchester advanced upon her with a smile, his fat hand outstretched. "I am Mr. Punchester," he said. "This is Mendoza, whose name you know. Mendoza, Miss Ottilie Wigmore."

Mendoza bowed gravely. "You made this?" he asked, indicating the drawing he held.

"Yes," she said simply, "I made it."

"It is remarkable," said Mendoza. "You must have eyes like a microscope."

"I like finnickin'," she said. "You don't."

"I can't," said Mendoza.

"Then," she said, "I shall go on finnickin'. It's something to be able to do what Mendoza can't."

Mendoza's brow twitched a little grimly. Then

18 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

he saw that it wasn't flattery. How? I don't know. He saw it. Mendoza saw things that other men didn't. He laughed. "Thank you," he said. "If I say that I admire your work very much, you won't think I'm only paying you in your own coin, I hope."

"I am glad you admire it," she said, "but if you don't know good work when you see it, who should? What I do is good as far as it goes, but that's not very far. I make pretty patterns, that's all."

"You have design," said Mendoza. "Your line is charming. Somehow, also, you achieve breadth. That is wonderful. But to tell you the truth this kind of thing tires my eyes. That is my only complaint. Cannot you draw about four times bigger?"

"No," she said, "if I draw big, I don't care for it. It's seeing how much I can get on to the back of a postage stamp that interests me. It's a kink. Those six cakes now," she went on, going to him and leaning over her minute picture. "It took some doing to put those six cakes on that plate."

"I believe you," said Mendoza. "But you have come to talk to Mr. Punchester, not to me. I hope we shall meet again, Miss Wigmore. If I can be of service to you, please to command me. You draw as an ant might draw. It is prodigious. And it is as beautiful as a fine Japanese ivory. But I personally like Art to assume reasonable proportions. It is a kink. Probably it is just a matter of the eyes, eh? Anyway, good luck to you, Miss Wigmore, and *adios*. Punchester, tol lol."

He put the drawing back on the table, picked up his hat and his portfolio, and went away.

CHAPTER II

I

ALL this time Punchester had been standing on the hearthrug with his hands behind his back, benevolently and impartially beaming upon the Great Artist, and the Small one. He was pleased that this girl had arrived before Mendoza had departed. He could trust himself to provide the necessary antidote to the poison of Mendoza's praise; and meanwhile the presence of a man like Mendoza in his room must have impressed Miss Wigmore with the sense of his, Punchester's, power, while it must have flattered her to be introduced to the very first caricaturist of the day. Things like that told in many ways with the inexperienced. He thought a little more flattery mightn't come amiss.

"These," he said, advancing the five proofs of Mendoza's drawings and the three originals, "will interest you. He's doing an Album for the Autumn Supplement of *The Useless*. Tell me what you think of them. These pulls of Henry Roleston and Marie Peto are failures and will be done again. Bear that in mind, please."

She scrutinised the things in silence for some minute. Then she said: "If the devil could make

20 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

me draw like that, I think I would sell him my soul."

Punchester laughed his jolly huge laugh and put the pulls and drawings away in his desk. "The devil," he said, "isn't allowed to let loose more than one imp like Mendoza per century. You'll have to wait till 2000 A.D., by which time I'm afraid even you, Miss Wigmore," he smiled waggishly, paternally, "will be rather too old a little lady to think such a bargain good enough."

She gave him a chilly glance. "My age," she said, "is my parents' fault and my own affair. I came here to talk business, Mr. Punchester."

"Quite so, quite so," chirruped the Righteous Man approvingly. "Let us talk it by all means." And he thought, as he offered her a chair, "Now be damned to the little spit-fire!"

Here the maid came in. "Mr. Adkin, sir," she said.

"Tell him to wait," Punchester snapped at her. Then: "No, Bessie," he called. "Show him in now. I hope you won't mind, Miss Wigmore," he went on, "if I see this boy for a moment, as we haven't actually begun our talk yet. I'd like you to meet Adkin. He's quite a wonderful genius, but so hopelessly unpractical that I almost despair of ever making anything of him. But I keep on trying. I've sworn that he shall get home before I've done with him. A dear fellow, but rather a trial to his friends. Ah! here he is."

A tall, slack-built youth with a mop of whitey-yellow hair stood blinking in the doorway. He was

very shabbily dressed in rough Harris tweed of a hue that bordered upon orange. It hung all over him, and at the cuffs it was frayed into fringes, while at one elbow it was threadbare. He had on a low soft collar of mauve cotton and he wore no necktie whatever. His flannel shirt was green. His boots were patched in places and very dusty. The inevitable portfolio was under his arm; it was very old and worn. In one pocket of his jacket a soft hat of green felt had been rammed.

"Come in, Raymond," Mr. Punchester called encouragingly. "Come in and let me introduce you to Miss Ottilie Wigmore, whose work, I venture to prophesy, is going to make us all sit up one of these days. I've just been telling her about you. Miss Wigmore, Mr. Raymond Adkin. You're neighbours in Chelsea, I think."

"Yes," said Adkin, as he shook hands with Ottilie. "She lives in Hobbema Studios, I fancy," he said. "At any rate, I tracked her there last week. But she's a new-comer to Chelsea. What's she do, Mr. Punchester? Oils thirty feet by fifty, I should say, from the look of her." He stared down at Ottilie with his dreamy blue eyes and gave her a friendly grin. His voice was a very pleasant one to Ottilie's ear. She wasn't in the least annoyed by his attitude towards her. She felt that, had he knocked on her door after following her home, she would have asked him in without hesitation. His face was entirely honest and good. A simpleton, unquestionably. A dear hopeless simpleton. She felt an impulse to put her arms round him, stroke

22 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

his head, and tell him that it would be all right. She restrained it.

"I do pen drawings," she said, "five inches by four."

"This," said Punchester, "is one of them." He proffered the lady in bed.

Adkin screwed up his eyes and examined the drawing at a range of about three-quarters of a foot.

"My word!" he said at once. "This is the goods all right, Mr. Punchester. Look at those curtains and that lacquer-work. I say," he went on admiringly to Ottilie, "you're a little marvel, you know. You got any more like this?"

"Miss Wigmore and I," said Punchester, "were just going to have a talk over her work, Raymond. I thought I'd better polish you off before we started. Save you waiting, you know."

"Right!" said Adkin. "Much obliged to you both. It's a bore waiting always. As a matter of fact, I couldn't have waited more than half an hour. I'm lunching with a man in Pimlico at one, and we're going to have an afternoon with Bach, he on his piano, I on my fiddle. I left it downstairs, you know."

Punchester shook his head. "Raymond, Raymond," he said, "music'll be your ruin yet. Bach'll put no money to your account at the bank."

"Haven't got an account or a bank either," said Adkin with his cheerful grin. "When I have, p'raps I'll let Bach go fishing for a bit. P'raps not. Probably not. In fact, almost certainly not. But

there's even more than Bach in this appointment of mine. Didn't I tell you I was lunching also? My friend's promised me a beef-steak pudding and he's bet me a sovereign I won't be able to finish it. If you hear a loud report, Mr. Punchester, about half-past one, you'll know that I owe a sovereign to my friend Stiles." He bent once more over Ottilie's drawing. "My God!" he said, "what a thing!"

"Come, come, Raymond," said Punchester a trifle impatiently. "Suppose you let me see what you've brought. You promised me these drawings at the beginning of this week, and here it is Thursday——"

Adkin started and looked up staring. "You don't mean to say this is Thursday," he cried.

"Certainly it is. And I do really think, Raymond——"

"Thursday," Adkin repeated. "Oh, horrors! My lunch isn't till to-morrow," and he burst out into a roar of laughter.

"Well," said Punchester, "what of it, you lunatic? Let's see your drawings. This is Miss Wigmore's time, you know."

"Oh, my goodness," cried Adkin, "so it is. I'm ever so sorry. Of course. Here you are, Mr. Punchester." He tugged impatiently at the knot that fastened his portfolio and tore the string away from the cardboard. Without one sign of annoyance he opened the portfolio and took out four drawings, designs in pen and ink for book-covers.

"One of these days," said Punchester to Ottilie, "I am going to have my choicest books choicely

24 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

bound. Meanwhile Raymond here is designing some covers for me. Which have you brought this time, Raymond?"

"Ben Jonson," said Adkin, "Isaac Walton, Blake and The Opium Eater. What do you think of them?" he asked, addressing not Punchester but Otilie.

Two of the designs were extremely simple; the other two elaborate to the last degree. Of these latter the motives were both floral, but where did such flowers ever grow; flowers with faces, faces of cherubs, faces of devils, yet flowers and nothing but flowers? And every face differing (slightly as each bloom on a spray differs from her sisters) in size, shape and expression from all the rest. Faces, here, enraptured, faces beatific, faces sentimental, faces roguish; faces, there, malevolent, faces despairing, faces tortured, faces damned. And yet the pattern was never lost.

At the first glance it seemed in each case that every flower was an exact repetition of the next; only after a moment did the realisation suddenly dawn that here was a crowd of individuals, hag-ridden by every dreadful passion or possessed by every form of happiness.

Of the two simple designs the first was of three white masks strung on a looped white cord, all on a black ground; the other was of five fat, vast, goggle-eyed fishes swimming along an S of running water, with a tiny bridge over it at the top and a tiny mill alongside it at the bottom. The masks were very ghastly as masks always are, because from behind their empty sockets, baleful eyes may, it seems, at

any moment glare. The fishes were fussy and anxious as fat fishes must always be, and they swam visibly upon their preposterous river.

These designs were all drawn with a freedom and a certainty and a rapture that the movements of a great dancer show, and Otilie, as she looked at them, felt a sort of sudden intoxication stealing upon her.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh! the good work!"

Punchester was not moved. "Yes, Raymond," he said after he had made his examination, "these are pretty good. I like them all but the masks. You'd better try that again. The big one's too big and the small one's too small. At least so they seem to me. And I shouldn't have them all three dead white. I should put a tone of fairly close lines right over one of them. But their places on the paper are just as they should be. Let me have the new design as soon as you can. You'd better leave this one that I don't care about. It'll be interesting to compare it with the new one. And now off with you. We've taken up too much of Miss Wigmore's time as it is. I'll send you your cheque for these three to-night. Good-bye, my boy. Don't waste too much time over your fiddling to-morrow. Good-bye."

He ballooned Mr. Adkin out of the room and closed the door on him.

II

"Now, Miss Wigmore," he went on, as he came back to the window and picked up Otilie's drawing,

26 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"let's get to our talk. You have sent me this drawing with a request for an interview. I have given you the interview. Proceed, Miss Wigmore."

He fixed a black-rimmed monocle in front of his porcelain eye and affected to regard her through it. She was in no wise upset by this manœuvre.

"What do you think of my drawing?" she asked.

"I agree with Mendoza," he said. "It is remarkable. *Et après?*"

"Do you think it is good enough for *The Useless?*"

This was the moment for the administration of the antidote.

"No," he said, lying, "I don't."

Ottilie took it smiling.

"Do you think I shall be able to produce work that is good enough for *The Useless?*" she asked.

This was the moment for the administration of the antidote to the antidote.

"Yes," he said, "I do."

Ottilie took this verdict as she had taken the former, that is to say, smiling. "You encourage me," she said.

"I meant to," he answered, as he leaned back in his chair and put his finger-and-thumb-tips together. "It is my work in life to encourage talent. As good a work in life as another, I think, Miss Wigmore. Costly, perhaps, but worth while. Disappointing at times, but still worth while. I happen to have a little money and I happen to have an eye for good work. I spot young painters and writers of promise; I make them; I enrich humanity, indi-

rectly. It is enough for me. I do not grudge the expense; I try to forget the disappointments; over the ingratitude I pass the sponge. There are other and sweeter rewards. It is something to be able to say when one dies, 'I have helped talent to its hearing.' "

"It must be," she said. "But I hope you are not thinking of dying just yet, Mr. Punchester. Not until you have made *me* at any rate."

His eyes narrowed slightly, but only very slightly. Again he laughed most jollily. "Oh, no," he said, "I hope I shall be able to stave it off long enough for that. Not that that gives me many years. You should arrive quickly, Miss Ottilie, once you are put properly before the public."

"I hope," she said demurely, "that you don't propose to put me improperly before the public."

"Ha, ha!" said the Righteous Man, "Ha, ha! No, no! Ha, ha! We shall preserve decorum at all costs. You may rely on us to preserve decorum."

"I'm afraid," she said, "that that mayn't be as easy as you think. My drawings aren't precisely for Sunday School consumption, you know."

"I didn't know," said Punchester, brightening in spite of himself. "This lady in bed, now,—she is surely propriety personified."

"Yes," said Ottilie, "*she* is. *She's* all covered up. But she's not, perhaps, quite representative. I sent her to you because she's in many ways the best thing I've done. But suppose I show you what I have in my portfolio."

The Righteous Man leaned forward. "Do," he said. "Pray do."

Ottilie did. The ladies she now exhibited were not all covered up. I mean they were all covered up to a certain extent. I mean, some of all of them was covered up. I mean all of none of them wasn't. They wore bathing dress and ball dresses. When they wore ball dresses they predominated over their coverings a little more than when they wore bathing dresses. Only a little more. The margin was too narrow for more than a little more. They also wore bed-dresses. Here they predominated, perhaps, least of all. I only say perhaps. For these measurements a micrometer would be wanted. All these drawings were done on large sheets of Bristol board of which they occupied the central few square inches. There were precisely eleven of them. They were all exquisite and exquisitely naughty.

The Righteous Man, while he looked at them, had much ado to prevent himself from crying out: "But these things are marvellous! But these things are colossal! But these things are what we've all been waiting for! *The Useless* must and shall have these things."

He managed, however, to preserve silence—silence is a first-rate antidote—until he had gone carefully through the entire collection. Then he leaned back once more in his chair, put his thumbs and fingers together as before, pursed up his lips and said: "Very pretty indeed."

First, silence; then, faint praise. That was his recipe for swelled young heads.

Ottillie could have burst out crying. Instead she began to put her drawings back into her portfolio. "I shall try *The Prattler*," she said. "I'm sorry I've wasted your time, Mr. Punchester."

The Righteous Man took alarm. He let fall his monocle and held up one plump protesting hand.

"On the contrary, Miss Wigmore," he said, "you have wasted neither my time nor, I hope, your own. Let me implore you not to take huff because I am a little cautious. Can you not see that a magazine like *The Useless* has to pause for consideration before it connects itself with the work of an unknown artist? If I hesitate, it is not because I don't sincerely admire these drawings of yours. I think them extraordinary. My only doubt is if they represent the best you will ever be able to do, or are only a beginning. Where all are so good it's hard to make comparisons, but—if you will allow me—this and this and this seem to be much in advance of this one and this. I may be wrong, but I would hazard a guess that you did these two before you did these three."

She looked at him with genuine admiration. "No wonder you've made *The Useless* go," she said. "You're quite right."

"And the Lady in Bed," he went on, "is your latest? Yes? Well, you said yourself that it was probably your best. I think it is, though it lacks the diablerie of the others. But for pattern and sheer penmanship it has no rival among them, I'm sure. Very well, then. If these twelve drawings can show so much advance, I am wondering what

twelve more mightn't show. They mightn't show anything, of course. You may have reached your summit already. But I think not. I think not, Miss Wigmore. Now it isn't as if you hadn't plenty of time before you. And it isn't as if there was a vacancy on *The Useless* at the moment. I rather fancy there may be one at no distant date. In one quarter at least I see signs of a coming breakaway. The old story, ingratitude bred of success. But no more of that. What I want you to consider is this. Would you rather come before the public now—at once—in the pages of *The Prattler*, let us say, and become just one of a swarm of quite capable black-and-white people and have to wait perhaps ten years before your work at last compels attention to itself and brings you to the top; or will you wait six months or a year and then come straight into *The Useless*, where your quality will at once be recognised? And would you rather sell these drawings to *The Prattler* to-day—drawings which perhaps only show of what you are really capable—or see an infinitely better set, which I am sure you can make, starting in *The Useless* say eighteen months hence? It is hardly for me to advise you, but I think if you asked me, I should say: 'Be satisfied, from the word Go, with nothing but the best—the best you can do and the best medium for showing it that you can secure.' I think that would be good advice. Now what do you think?"

"I think," said Otilie slowly, "that I will think it over. As you say, it isn't as if I hadn't plenty of time before me. And it isn't as if I hadn't a certain

amount of money to keep me going. I shan't starve if I don't sell a drawing."

"I'm glad to hear that," he said warmly, but mendaciously. "The tragedy of young, rare talent is so often its poverty. It has to sell or starve. In how many cases have I seen that dilemma the ruin of a great gift. Oh! I assure you, Miss Wigmore, a publisher—if he has at all a soft heart—is not an enviable mortal. But don't let us be gloomy. You will leave your portfolio with me? I would like to show your drawings to one or two people whose opinion I value. Lord Froling, for instance, a collector of international repute. Perhaps you know his name."

"Yes," said Ottilie. "I've heard it." She didn't add (as she might truthfully have done) that this peer was her maternal uncle.

"Perhaps," she went on, "if you really want to keep these drawings for a time, you'll be kind enough to give me a receipt for them. I'm afraid I'm frightfully business-like for an artist, but I've had to learn my way about. And it occurs to me that if you should die to-night I would have nothing to prove to your executors that I hadn't made you a present of my drawings." She sat down at the writing table and wrote for a moment on a sheet of his letter paper. "There!" she said, pointing to the place with one tiny finger. "That's where your name comes, please."

The Righteous Man read.

"Received for my consideration as possible contributions to The Useless magazine twelve small pen

32 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

drawings, signed Otilie, the property of Miss Otilie Wigmore, of No. 36, Hobbema Studios, Chelsea. To be returned to her at once in case of my decease, or in any case on her demand in writing.—

“(Signed)

“Dated.”

The Righteous Man took up his pen to sign his name. He didn't like doing this at all. It was not his habit to give such receipts. It was, indeed, his habit not to give them. But evidently, in this case, his habit would have to be broken. If these twelve drawings were to pass into his possession for nothing, it would not be because their creator would have proved herself too timid or too slack to fight for their return.

He conceived a rather terrified admiration of this Miss Otilie Wigmore. What, he wondered, were these young artists coming to? They had not used to be thus. Nor, thank God, were they all thus now. In fact there were, so far as he knew—thank God!—none others of this kind. A portent, that's what this girl was, and a horrid one. A girl to watch rather carefully. A girl who might play a man a devilish nasty trick.

But *The Useless* must have her. Unquestionably. He signed his name.

Otilie blotted it. Then she folded up her paper, put it away in her bag and held out her hand. He took it rather limply.

“Good-bye, Mr. Punchester,” she said. “I'll get to work on another dozen at once. I'll let you know when I'm ready for your verdict. Good-

bye." He opened the door for her. She picked up her portfolio and umbrella and sailed out of the room.

The Righteous Man closed the door upon her softly and stood for a moment rubbing his chin, reflective.

"*Not* a nice little girl," he murmured at last.

CHAPTER III

I

WHEN Mendoza left the house of the Righteous Man he went through Cockpit Steps into Birdcage Walk and made his way into the park. His interview with Punchester had given him a vague desire for the fresh air, sunlight, greenery, and the sight of honest, gobbling ducks, which the park would provide.

Against Punchester he had no definite complaint whatever. The man had always treated him with cordial civility and in the matter of the Album had met him quite fairly and without a haggle. He was certainly going to produce these drawings in the very best possible way. He obviously regarded it as a high privilege to be concerned in their production. It is difficult for an artist to resist such treatment, and Mendoza knew that he had no reasonable ground for his dislike of Punchester. It was simply that his flesh crawled a little whenever he was near him.

At any rate, St. James's Park called Mendoza and into St. James's Park he went. Once there, he directed his steps towards the lake. Very soon he stood among a group of idlers who gaped at certain

pelicans which had thoughtfully disposed themselves on the green sward just beyond the railings.

The pelican is one of the master-fruits of God's grotesque humour.

Mendoza had long known this, but hitherto he had always been too busy with other results of the humour in question to give any particular attention to this bird. The moment seemed to have come for repairing this omission. He took a sketch-book out of his pocket and began to draw pelicans. Soon he was closely surrounded by admiring persons. So long as spectators did not actually climb upon his shoulders Mendoza was indifferent to their presence in his vicinity. In the country of his origin an artist learns tolerance of the public's curiosity; for the Spanish gaper knows no moderation and out-of-door painting is conducted not in front of, but in the centre of a dense throng. God and themselves know how those unfortunate Spanish plein-airists manage it. Perhaps this is why Spanish painters exhibit such a marked predilection for portraiture. But to resume.

Mendoza had covered some three pages of his notebook with lively and comical studies, when to the company of watchers was added a tall young man with a mop of light yellow hair, who carried a portfolio and wore orange-coloured clothes, a mauve collar—Adkin, in fact.

He, too, had succumbed to the lure of the park and instead of hastening home to set about the drawing of a *new book-cover* for Punchester, had *come to fritter away the priceless moments of his*

36 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

youth in the self-indulgent contemplation of an agreeable scene. The crowd round Mendoza and its laughter—for it was being well entertained—had quickly caught his eye, and, seeing a man sketching, he had most naturally come up to have a look.

With his first glance at Mendoza's work his eyes widened. "By God!" he murmured in the ear of a dainty, tiptoed young lady. "By God!"

He took her place and thrust inwards. Soon he was just behind Mendoza.

He had recognised the Spaniard at once—every young artist in Chelsea knew Mendoza—and he was eaten up with the desire to see him draw. Such a chance as this didn't come a fellow's way every morning. He stood thereafter rooted to the soil within two feet of Mendoza's elbow, until Mendoza had finished with the pelicans.

Mendoza suddenly shut his notebook and put it in his pocket. He began to roll a cigarette with his eyes still, fascinated, on the pelicans. At the same moment the group of gazers broke up. It appeared that the free show was over. One elderly gentleman remained, however; while Raymond Adkin, after taking a step or two, lingered, loth to quit the spot. Mendoza, turning, found himself confronted by the elderly gentleman. This person was corpulent, whiskery, and red of cheek, prosperous and amiably disposed to encourage talent. "My friend," he said to Mendoza, "permit me to tell you that you really draw quite well. Yes, quite amusing, your pelicans are. May I look at them again?"

"Assuredly," said Mendoza. He pulled out his book and opened it.

The elderly gentleman took it between finger and thumb; mounted a pince-nez; looked wise. "Hum!" he said. "Yes. Very good indeed. Quite creditable. Are you a professional, may I ask?"

"Oh, no," said Mendoza. "I only do it to amuse myself."

"You do, eh?" said the elderly gentleman. "Well, let me tell you that, in my opinion, you might do a great deal worse than cultivate your gift seriously. For a foreigner you have a great natural talent. You should really take some lessons."

"Oh!" said Mendoza, "I have not the time for that."

"Indeed? A pity. And what, may I ask, *do* you do?"

"I am a grocer's assistant," said Mendoza. "Naturally."

"Really. A grocer's—but how do you come to be here at this time of a morning?"

"You see," said Mendoza confidentially, "I got the sack yesterday. You see, I sold a pound of two-and-eightpenny tea by mistake for one of two-and-fourpenny. My *guv'nor* wouldn't stand that, of course. The funny thing, though, is that I made this same mistake three days ago; only it was the other way round, and he did not mind a bit. How do you explain that?"

The elderly gentleman gave him rather a suspicious look.

"How do I account——"

38 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

Mendoza suddenly came close up to him. "I suppose," he said in a whining voice, "you couldn't help me to a place. You're not in the grocery line, are you, for example? No?"

"No," said the elderly gentleman. "No, not precisely." He was a retired banker. "No, I'm afraid—that is to say, I'm very sorry for you, my poor fellow, of course. But why don't you try to turn your drawing to account? I feel sure that some of these magazines——"

"Oh," said Mendoza, "they would have nothing to say to a mere amateur like me. But if you will lend me a ten-pound note, I will thank you very much."

"A ten-pound note!" cried the elderly gentleman. "A ten-pound—good God! whoever heard of such impudence? A ten——"

"Only for a year or two," said Mendoza, following him up. "Say five. Not more."

At this moment a bellow of laughter close behind him caused the now apprehensive elderly gentleman to spin round with a little cry. He discovered, not a yard away from his own, the grinning face of a tow-headed young man in orange-coloured—in short Adkin. This person roared out: "It's Mendoza, you damned old fool," and waved his arms aloft in an ecstasy of mirth.

"Mendoza?" exclaimed the elderly gentleman. "Who the devil's he, and who the devil are you?"

"I'm a draper's assistant," shouted Raymond. "Ha, ha! A draper's assistant. Out of a job, too!

Ha, ha! Lend me fifty pounds—ha, ha—and I'll—ha, ha!—I'll—oh, lor!"

"Good God!" gasped the elderly gentleman as he took up his legs and waddled hastily out of this story.

Mendoza smiled and, his eye falling on Raymond's portfolio: "I didn't know there was a brother near," he said. "I am glad you have been entertained. But you spoilt my game for me, you know."

"I'm sorry," said Raymond, "but I couldn't help it. I had to butt in. Do you think he's gone for a policeman?"

"I hope so," said Mendoza. "Let us wait and see. I always like to carry things through as far as they will go. When he comes, you shall explain who I am and I shall explain who you are. And by the way, who are you?"

Raymond told him. The youth was in the seventh heaven of delight and was praying hard for the elderly gentleman's return. To be associated with Mendoza in a ludicrous adventure—could anything be more glorious than this? Nothing, surely, but the further development of the adventure.

This, however, was not to be. Either the elderly gentleman could not find a policeman or he thought it safer not to find one; he failed, at any rate, to reappear. While they waited for him, the two artists fell into talk.

It was not long before Mendoza, who liked the boy well, said: "I suppose you wouldn't care to show me your work? What do you say to opening that portfolio of yours?"

40 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"It's empty," said Raymond. "I've just left all I had in it with Punchester. I expect you know Punchester."

"Yes," said Mendoza. "I have just come from there myself. *The Useless* is doing an Album of my things."

"Hosannah!" said Raymond. "That'll be something to look forward to."

"Thank you," said Mendoza. "I hope he will be doing an Album of your things one of these days."

"Mine? Oh, my goodness, if I could only think it. Why, if I can get on to *The Useless* in ten years' time, it's as much as I can hope for. But I do hope for that. Punchester's been dashed good to me, you know. I'm doing book-covers for him just now. Rather jolly work too. Extraordinary sound eye for design, Punchester has. He's taught me a lot in the last year or two. And talking of design, I wonder if you met a girl up there—a Miss Wimpole, was it? She was with Punchester just now."

"Wigmore," said Mendoza. "Yes, I met her. Did you see that drawing of hers?"

"I did, and I thought it a knock-out. How did it strike you?"

"Rather the same way," said Mendoza. "If that young lady can keep it up she will make a name for herself. Who is she?"

"Haven't an idea. She lives, I believe, in Hobbema Studios, and that's all I can tell you about her. And she can't have been long in Chelsea. She's not the kind of girl one could overlook, a tiny lovely thing like that. I marked her down only the

other day. I wish I could have seen what she had in that scarlet portfolio of hers. If it's anything like as good as that big bed, Punchester ought to put her on *The Useless* at the next vacancy. I'll tell him so, too, when I see him again. By that time I mean to have seen more of her stuff. I shall haunt Hobbema Studios for a day or two. I simply must get a look inside that scarlet portfolio, if it takes me a year doing nothing else."

"Well," said Mendoza, "perhaps you won't have to wait so long, for here she comes. So that your career may not be ruined, I propose to waylay her."

Miss Wigmore was advancing briskly towards them, the scarlet portfolio under one arm.

II

Ottilie was on her way to Bond Street. Not to buy anything there, but to study hats. Not in the shops; on heads. Not for the sake of her own head; for the holy purposes of her Art. Its game was Feminine Absurdity, and where Feminine Absurdity was to be studied, there it was her duty, from time to time (but regularly) to be. She proposed to devote an hour to Bond Street, Regent Street and Piccadilly, collecting impressions of the newest millinery, with a vigilant eye also for the gowns and all such costly fallals as hand-bags, crystal pendants, parasol handles, pet dogs, lorgnettes, and ankle-bracelets. Then she proposed to lunch on a bun and walk (for exercise) back to Chelsea via Knightsbridge and Sloane Street.

42 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

It was now not far off half-past twelve, and by half-past one the desire for meat and drink would be driving the majority of the women indoors. She had not too much time and she was putting her best foot foremost as she came towards Raymond and Mendoza.

Mendoza's eyes lit up with pleasure in the perfection of this minute, brisk, definite and beautiful creature, with its white touches so skilfully disposed upon its black ground, and its single vivid splash of scarlet. His sense of humour was also stirred, as it couldn't help being; but less than his sense of beauty.

He stepped out into the path and raised his hat.

"Miss Wigmore," he said, "can you spare a moment to two of your very sincere admirers?"

Ottilie halted and considered him. She knew nothing of this man but his work. That was supreme; but what of him? A Spaniard. A loose fish, probably. A person to keep at arm's length. Or not?

She considered him gravely with her large, brown, liquid eyes, her head a little on one side in the attitude which he now saw to be characteristic.

"No," she thought. "A good fellow. A kind, ugly face and the voice of a guardian angel. All's well." And, "Of course," she said. "What is it?"

"Adkin, here, and I," he explained, "have seen one of your drawings, and it has given us a violent appetite for more. Is it conceivable that you would—*that you could*——"

"What?" she said. "Show you my things here? Why not? Only they're all up yonder," and she cocked her chin at Queen Anne's Gate. "Mr. Punchester wants to look them over and get some other people's opinions on them."

"Alas!" cried Mendoza. "Adkin, let us go and murder Punchester and teach him to stand between us and our desires."

"Right!" said Raymond. "Come on." He pulled out his penknife, opened it and began to whet it on his palm.

"I won't have it," cried Otilie. "My whole future depends on Mr. Punchester. He shall not be murdered."

"But," said Mendoza seriously, "he withholds your drawings from our sight. I am afraid he must die. Adkin, I will brain him with a chair and you shall finish him off with a nick in the jugular. Then we shall bring Miss Wigmore's drawings out here. You will wait for us, Miss Wigmore? We will not be more than ten minutes over the job. And then we'll all go and have lunch somewhere, and Adkin and I will gloat upon your pictures, while you shall talk about them to us. Is it agreed?"

"No," said Otilie, "it isn't. I suggest a compromise. You shall both come to tea at my studio this afternoon, and I will show you what I've got there. It'll be my very first tea-party. I shouldn't venture to ask you, Mr. Mendoza, if it wasn't that you compel me. I simply can't afford to have Mr. Punchester slaughtered just yet."

Mendoza looked at Adkin. "Can you wait all

44 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

that long time?" he asked. "There will be tea, you know. What do you think?"

Adkin looked at Mendoza. "Yes," he said "there'll be tea. What do *you* think?"

"I think," said Mendoza, "that, since there will be tea, we might stretch a point for Punchester. But if we do, Miss Wigmore, you and Adkin are going to come and lunch with me now at the Café Royal."

She laughed indulgently. "You two clowns!" she said. "How am I to refuse?"

"Let us then be off at once," said Mendoza, "before the Señorita changes her mind. Adkin, fall in on her left I will guard the other flank. Forward! March!"

"This is all very fine," cried Raymond as they moved off, "but why should you stand *me* lunch at the Café Royal? I haven't asked you to tea to see my masterpieces. I can't ask anyone to tea in my garret. It's only a bedroom. And I've practically nothing to show that's worth showing, if you did come. Why should you——"

"You are my chaperon," said Mendoza. "Miss Wigmore will allow me a chaperon, I hope."

"What you want," said Ottilie, "is a keeper. So do you, Mr. Adkin," she added impartially.

"All right," said Mendoza, "Adkin shall be my keeper, if you prefer it; and I shall be his. You cannot say we don't try to meet your wishes, Miss Wigmore. Tell me if this is what you might fancy for lunch—*hors d'œuvres* (the best in all London), sole Normande, a braized sweetbread with new

peas, lamb cutlets, plain grilled with fried potatoes and grilled tomatoes, peaches Melba, Moulin à Vent, crème de menthe, black coffee and cigarettes. How does that sound?"

"It sounds like a beautiful piece of music," said Ottilie. "What do you say to it, Mr. Adkin?"

"Hush!" said Raymond. "I'm saying my prayers to it."

III

"If you eat any more of those *hors d'œuvres*, Mr. Adkin," said Ottilie a little later, "you'll have no room for the sole Normande, not to mention the rest of this lunch."

"I don't know what kind of a sole a sole Normande is," said Raymond, "but it'll have to be as big as Jonah's whale if it intends to inconvenience me this morning. This happens to be to-day's breakfast and last night's dinner that I'm eating out of all these little plates. I shan't begin my lunch till the sweetbreads appear. I'm doing the one meal a day cure just at present, Miss Wigmore."

"Only one meal a day!" she exclaimed. "That sounds very drastic."

Raymond filled his mouth with tunny. "But," he said, "look what a fine appetite it gives one."

"But do you think it's quite wise?" she asked anxiously.

Raymond winked at Mendoza and drew the remains of a shrimp salad towards him. "Doctor's orders," he said. "Positive. I paid a chap

in Harley Street ten guineas to put me on this régime."

She flushed delicately, for she had understood at last.

"Between friends," she said, "what is your opinion, you two, of Mr. Punchester? I have heard things——"

"Don't you believe them," said Raymond warmly, "Punchester's all right. I've worked for him long enough to know. He's been extraordinarily decent to me. Kept me going in fact. Hadn't been for him, I'd have come right unstuck. People slang Punchester because they can't get in with him. And every publisher is a bad egg according to somebody. But look at the way *The Useless* men stay on it. It's the rarest thing in the world for a man to break away from *The Useless*. What if Punchester does pay low rates? He gives unknown men their chance; he makes them, doesn't he? It's only because he pays low rates that he can reproduce them as he does. There's no finer colour-printing done anywhere than in *The Useless*. Very well then; these blighters ought to be jolly grateful to him. But are they? Not a bit. They go about calling him a sweater; but they stick to *The Useless* like wax, because if they're on it they can sell their other stuff elsewhere as fast as they turn it out and charge fat prices for their pictures. It's something to be on a magazine like *The Useless* that's known absolutely all over the world. There are people who sneer at it and call it precious; but you won't find that they've ever been invited to join it. If they

had, they'd be on it and freezing to it with both hands. No, Miss Wigmore," he concluded emphatically, while he finished up the sardines, "take it from me, Punchester's a good chap. I'm afraid I've made you a speech rather, but it always gets my back up to hear Punchester ticked off."

Ottilie approved his loyalty with a small satisfied nod. "Well," she said gently, "I'm sorry if I've annoyed you. I was only asking for information. But you're quite right to stand up for your friend. And now, what does Mr. Mendoza say?"

A young lady not easily to be deflected from her purpose.

"I?" said Mendoza. "Oh! I don't know much about him. I've heard some things, of course, like everyone else; I mean about his low rates and how he is making *The Useless* pay rather better than he would wish us to think. But, as Adkin says, every publisher has his enemies—it is not reasonable to expect anything else—and I do not pay much heed to such gossip. All I know is that he has treated me very well over this Album of mine that he is doing. But here comes our sole. Please don't let us spoil it by talking about publishers. Let us rather talk about ourselves. And to begin with, what Adkin and I want to know is where Miss Wigmore acquired the skill to draw ladies in bed as she does. If it was in an art school, I shall eat Adkin's hat and he shall eat mine. Won't we, Adkin?"

"We will," said Adkin, beginning, like a wise man, on his piece of sole.

"Why," said Ottilie, "that's easily told. I learnt drawing at home from my father. Proper drawing, you understand, not drawing as I draw now. He didn't approve of my way at all and he never would let me do it, if he could help it. But I can't be happy on any scale but one or two inches each way. It's a vice. Until he died, poor dear, six years ago, he was able to keep me spread out to respectable dimensions. Since then I've dwindled steadily."

"He wasn't, by any chance, the man who wrote a book on the Early British Watercolourists?" Adkin inquired.

"Yes," cried Ottilie, her face lighting up. "That's right. You don't mean to say you know it?"

"It was in the library of my Art School at home," said Adkin. "Extraordinarily learned book and horribly difficult to understand. Your father must have known a lot."

"He did," she replied eagerly, "that's exactly what he was—learned. And I don't wonder you found him difficult. If he could have expressed what he knew simply, he'd have been a wonderful critical writer. But he couldn't. It was the same with his painting. He painted learnedly and it was as dull as it could be—just like his writing. He admitted it himself. He had nothing but knowledge; no power to do anything with it. He hardly ever sold a picture and he never wrote another book. That one he did write was a complete failure, so far as money went. It got splendid reviews, but nobody

would buy it. I can't understand how it came to be in your Art School. We were pretty poor, of course, and if it hadn't been that my mother had a bit of money, I don't know what would have happened to us. She ran off with my father. He was an adorable person and she chucked everything for him. Her family cut her off—biff!—like that. They thought a whole lot of themselves and the disgrace drove them all nearly mad. She never had a word from any of them again, poor darling, except through the family solicitor. They knew she was on the rocks most of the time, but they never offered to do a thing for her. When my grandmother was dying she asked for my mother and they never let my mother know. That was my uncle's work. He was head of the clan and her only brother, and what he said went absolutely with the rest of the family. My mother heard about it from an old servant—I——”

She broke off and reddened, conscious suddenly that she had been letting her tongue run away with her.

Simultaneously Adkin smote his fist on the table till the glasses jumped. “The dirty dog!” he exclaimed.

Ottillie jumped too. “Oh dear!” she said, “you oughtn't to have let me get started on my mother's family. I'm not responsible for what I say. Not another word about them, please, the hateful things. I want to eat my fish before it's stone cold. Mr. Adkin to address the meeting.”

“I'd rather address your uncle,” said Adkin be-

tween his teeth. "Good God! what a swine he must be. Did you ever hear the like of it, Mendoza—keeping her away from her dying mother?"

Mendoza's ear had caught a certain strained note in Ottilie's voice, while he had become aware that her eyes had grown suddenly very large and bright. He judged it well to banish this topic.

He leaned forward and said in a low voice: "Do you see that man in the grey bowler hat, who's just going out?"

"Yes," they said. "Who is he?" Everybody at the Café Royal may be Somebody.

Mendoza had by this time decided who he should be.

"Finkelstein," he said impressively.

"Well," said Adkin, "what about him? What does he do?"

Mendoza was already prepared with a business for Finkelstein.

"He's a professional murderer," he said. "In New York he is known as the King of the Gunmen. He is serving a sentence for life in Sing Sing prison just now, for shooting three Senators from the Middle West dead in the Madison Square Roof Garden."

Raymond Adkin gaped. "He's serving—then what the deuce is he doing here?"

"Oh," said Mendoza easily, "he is out on parole, you know. The police of New York bear him no malice, for he never shoots any of them. And so, when he complained that his health was suffering from the confinement, the prison doctor was in-

structed to recommend a six months' voyage to Europe for him. He has only been a week over on this side, but you would never believe what a lot of good the change has done him already."

Here Ottilie giggled at Adkin's round eyes.

Adkin stared at her and suddenly guffawed. "I'll be hanged," he said, "if you didn't take me in. After that old man in the Park I ought to have known better. I didn't tell you about that," he went on, turning to Ottilie. "You see——"

Mendoza leant back and lit a cigarette.

It was three o'clock before they moved on to Ottilie's studio.

CHAPTER IV

I

HERE a convenient opportunity seems to present itself for making you a little more particularly acquainted than you are already with the antecedents of my heroine.

Her father, as you know, had been an unsuccessful painter. Her mother had been the youngest sister of a British baron.

Reginald Octavius Wigmore had come of a good enough family, but his branch of it had failed to maintain connection with the sap-supply and had withered accordingly. He had been possessed of a handsome face, a frail body, charming manners, a wide knowledge of the theory of painting and an uninspired talent for limning landscapes and of nothing else whatever. These advantages had, however, proved sufficient to cause a daughter of the Frolings to throw in her lot with his.

Thereupon the Frolings went mad with rage and cut this unnatural girl off from the number of their tribe. They would have robbed her of the two hundred pounds a year she had (from an uncle-godfather) if the law had allowed them to *do so*. But it didn't and they had to content them-

selves with pretending (not unsuccessfully) that she no longer existed—never, indeed, had existed. They did not even speak of her as “poor Ottilie.”

Two hundred a year is an insufficient income for three gently-born people. For one, it is at any rate a competence. While her father lived, Ottilie had known something not far removed from penury. After he died, which happened in her twelfth year, things had been better. Now that her mother also was dead, the girl was by comparison affluent.

Reginald Octavius Wigmore had known a great deal better than he could do. He had painted the most uninteresting pictures imaginable, but he had been under no delusions as to their worth. He could make certain that they were technically sound, but beyond that he could not go. He knew, none better, that they were dead, yet it was not in him to make them live. The whole lore of picture making was at his command; he knew all there was to know about the technique of his craft; his critical faculty was acute and sound, if inarticulate. When it came to laying on paint he was precisely nowhere. He knew just how it should be done. He couldn't do it.

His pictures were honest, inoffensive, unmarketable duds.

He ought to have written about pictures, not painted them. But he happened to want to paint them, and he didn't happen to be able to express himself plausibly, or even intelligibly, in words, either written or (where more than two or three were gathered together) spoken. As an art critic *he would have been unreadable*; as a painting-

54 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

master he would have been incomprehensible. There was nothing for it but to go on producing duds.

Withal he was a dear, simple soul, much afflicted by his failure to provide luxuries for his wife and little girl.

Occasionally he did manage to sell a picture, but nearly all he made in this way had to go for paints and canvases. Mrs. Wigmore's two hundred a year was wanted for other things than these.

II

Ottilie began to draw as soon as she could hold a pencil. With this infant of his Reginald Octavius could talk easily enough. He found no difficulty in expressing himself while he had Ottilie for an audience. He became her teacher, gave her of his best and was soon rewarded first by the suspicion and then the conviction that he had fathered something extraordinary. Encouragement was not necessary; if anything, it was repression that Ottilie required; for she knew no moderation. She would have drawn happily from six in the morning till bedtime. She drew everything she saw and the amount of paper she used became alarming. Naturally she preferred the best paper and saw she got it, when she could. But if she couldn't, anything that would take a pencil would do—the margins of the newspaper, for instance, or the backs of old envelopes.

Reginald Octavius, at first with an eye to economy, preached the importance of deliberation, the

worthiness of slow, careful conception, the essential wickedness of the hit-or-miss method. Simultaneously he restricted the supply of the best paper; was implacable in the face of entreaty; laid a ban on the use of indiarubber. Otilie learned to value her materials and to husband her resources; learned to think long before she put down a line, a line which must remain. Thus she acquired good habits early. She also learned, when she drew for her own amusement, to draw very small. This is not a particularly good habit, though in her case fame was to come of it. When she drew for him Reginald Octavius made her draw big enough. And he talked Art to her eternally. He criticised her work quite seriously from the very first; her earliest scribbles were weighed in the balance of his considered judgment, and before she could talk properly she had listened to learned lectures. At first it was precious little of these discourses that she understood; but soon she began to catch here and there, at a meaning, to seize it, to digest it, to apply it. Her father's solemnity was impressive. This drawing was not, it appeared, just a funny game, but a high and wonderful mystery, which to practise was a privilege reserved for the very few. She began to take herself seriously and advanced thereafter rapidly. Her father lived long enough to set her feet firmly upon the right path. At twelve she was already a self-respecting, conscientious workman, possessed by the ambition to excel.

The death of Reginald Octavius made it possible for Mrs. Wigmore to live a little less straitly; there

was money to spare for Otilie's good paper now. Otilie didn't abuse her better fortune. The habits of discipline had been too carefully planted. She continued to work deliberately and to avoid the use of indiarubber. But she had never liked drawing big and, for a time, shirked it. The pictures she made at this period were all excessively minute.

Her mother, who knew nothing of Art and had adored Reginald Octavius for reasons quite unconnected with his painting, had nevertheless received from him the gospel of their child's uncommon talent. She denied herself some clothes and food yearly, and saw to it that Otilie's education was continued. Heaven, smiling upon her for her sacrifices, sent her a master, a queer old stick of a Frenchman called Bonivard, who maintained himself, with indifferent success, by teaching drawing to the young and adolescent of the Lower Middle Classes of Brighton. It was in this town, I should have told you, that Reginald Octavius had dwelt for the two years preceding his death. In Brighton his widow afterwards remained, for sheer lack of any reason to depart.

Old Bonivard was slowly dying of his pupils. Otilie restored him to health. In two months the pale, dejected senile had become a rosy, brisk, laughing old man. He had found something worth while to do again and he did it with his might. He realised what Otilie had done for him and his gratitude to her was immense. He grew besotted upon her and every hour that he could spare from the dreary business of earning his bread he gave hence-

forward to the cultivation of her talent. Very early he refused to receive any further payment whatever for his teaching.

"My God, dear madame," he told her mother, "your chile 'ave give me twenty more good year of life, and must I tek some dirty moneys for teach 'er. *Non pas! Rahzare not! Nevare, saperli-popotte!* I don't think. One does not do zose sings zere. Did *feu son papa* tek 'er bloomink moneys from 'er. No! An' wy? Because she was 'is chile. 'E give 'er life. One does not tek some dirty moneys from 'is chile. *Eh bien, alorss?* She give me life. I am 'er chile. Ho, ho! I am 'er small chile. One does not tek some dirty moneys from hees maman. And she give me 'ope. She make somesings grow 'ere, eenside een my ole 'eart. To teach er 'ees my joy, blow me! my privilege, *mon devoir*. She ees *artiste*. I am *artiste*. We are *confrères*. *Dites donc*, dear madame, anozzer year and—my God!—I cut myself ze blooming gorge by reason of my young *imbéciles* of *élèves*. And now? What can they do to me, those 'orrible young *imbéciles*? Nossing. I am arm against zem. I speet upon zem. I tek *zeir* dirty money, yace? Eet shall procure me some grubs, eet shall pay me my deegs; eet shall put me some cloze on my ole beck. Tek *zeir* money ees all raight. Yace! But your little Ottilie, eet ees anozzer pair of sleeves, my God! Damn if I tek a cent for teach 'er."

It was no use insisting. Ottilie's mother was forced to let him have his way. Old Bonivard was deeply obliged to her; kissed her hand; called

on the saints to reward her; set to work with redoubled enthusiasm upon Otilie's education.

Now Otilie drew big again. Old Bonivard was not the man to let her form bad habits. He made her draw bigger than ever she had drawn before. He did not urge her to resume the use of india-rubber. And he kept her steadily at black-and-white.

"Zere will be time enoff for ze couleur," he told her, "wen you have learn to draw ouatt you see, as eet ees. Zen shall you draw eet as you pliz."

Perhaps this was because he himself was primarily a black-and-white man, with no very eager sense of colour. In his young days in France he had been an etcher of some repute: but fashions come and go in etching, as in other things, and he had ceased to please the public. This was probably because the subjects which please the public had ceased to please him. There had been, too, an old mother and a sister—his was quite a commonplace story. He had been obliged to make his and their living in ways which left no time for poring over copper-plates and tickling them with a feather as they lay in their bath of acid. He had had to go out and earn so much weekly. Teaching had swallowed him up. And now, at seventy, he still taught. Why he taught in England rather than in France he seemed hardly to know himself. Perhaps there had been a romance. The cause of his coming to England he never divulged. Perhaps it was politics. At any rate, he had not gone back. His was not a forceful character.

He was, however, a first rate teacher. Otilie was lucky in her masters.

She had no others. When old Bonivard died (lamented inconsolably for many weeks by his young pupil) of pneumonia one foggy winter, she was sixteen. Somehow the problems of colour had never been investigated; and now, when she began to fumble about with paints on her own account, they didn't attract her. Her eye had been trained to see the world in terms of black-and-white. She felt always the need of a firm outline round things. She returned to her pen and ink and pencil and drew and drew and drew. And she ceased to draw big altogether, for she was young and naughty and there was nobody now to forbid her the minute art she loved.

But it didn't matter now. She had got her breadth and it persisted.

III

Since the turn of Otilie's art was satirical, she was lucky to have her home in a town which seems to attract grotesque human beings as jam does wasps. On the Brighton front at any time of the day, and at any season of the year, Otilie could be sure of finding something to enchant her eye. There strutted it the pompous colonel, the swelling actor-manager, the groomed broker, the shock-headed musico; there minced it the lovely lady of the Chorus; there skipped it and gambolled it the over-dressed infant of the newly rich; there rolled it in

her bath-chair the golden, hypochondriac aunt, with servile nephew and depressed companion in obsequious attendance; there, sabled to the eyes, waddled it the stout mother in Israel, shambled it by her side, more humbly, Israel's successful son.

Ottilie doted on them all, studied them with loving diligence, stored them up in her memory, and, when she got home, put them down faithfully on paper. She never drew on the spot; it wasted time, she found. It was better worth her while to commit what she saw to her retentive memory, which daily practice soon made infallible.

She doted on them all but chiefly on the lovely ladies. She never wearied of the lovely ladies. All other types were monotonous beside the lovely ladies. Nor was this surprising, since, all over the world, thousands and tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of highly intelligent persons were racking their brains, day and night, simply to discover new methods of varying the outward appearance of these same lovely ladies. No wonder they were un-monotonous. No wonder Ottilie never came to an end of it with them. No wonder she soon began to concentrate her attention almost wholly upon the gowns and the hats they wore, the gewgaws which bedecked them, their wonderful accessories, their handbags, parasols, muffs, veils, pet-dogs. Naturally she became a devourer of the fashion magazines; learned what to expect six months hence and to recognise it as soon as it arrived in Brighton. This might happen the very next day, and then she knew that the person who

had brought it was really worthy of her attention.

The fashion magazines introduced her to the wonderful houses which these wonderful people inhabited. She became wise about the furnishing of boudoirs, bedrooms, bath-rooms. She followed and carefully noted the changes of fashion in carpets, wall-decoration, chintzes, table linen, curtains, chairs, bric-a-brac. She knew when Queen Anne china was right and when Bristol glass was righter. She assisted at the Coming of Jade and Tortoiseshell and Ivory; at the Decline of Beads and the Fall of D'oylys.

In a word, she made lovely ladies her very own meat.

She drew them and she drew them and she drew them.

In the year after old Bonivard's death her mother fell ill. Their resources were barely sufficient to enable them to sustain this misfortune. Otilie was now too busy nursing to draw very much. All she sent to the magazines, in the hope of adding to their income, was either returned—or not returned. The girl was weary with looking after her mother, whose complaint was an exacting one; she lost heart; gave up trying; was almost tempted to give up drawing, but didn't.

A year went by and her mother died. Poor soul, she had had a hard time of it since the day she had elected to fly in the face of the Frolings; but she had never regretted her decision. It comforted her

62 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

a good deal in her last days to know that Otilie would have the two hundred a year.

She died and was buried and there was an end of her and her worries.

Otilie sold everything but a few of her father's pictures—among them portraits of himself and his wife, neither of them at all successful—and came to London; took a studio in Chelsea; set her teeth; and went to work to draw lovely ladies.

She was now just eighteen years old.

CHAPTER V

I

HOBBEA STUDIOS was a honeycomb, four storeys high, of cemented corridors, stone stairs, iron railings, whitewashed ceilings and small, uncomfortable rooms. A most chill and dreary place—at first sight very like a gaol.

Its denizens, however, were astonishing unlike prisoners.

Prisoners are notoriously the prey of the barber. In Hobbema Studios hair enjoyed a splendid licence. It lay thick upon coat collars and it spouted shamelessly—nay, challengingly from chins, cheeks and lips. This, of course, is to be understood of the male persons whom you met in the passages. The females adjusted the balance by bobbing their locks. I speak of these matters only in a general way. There were certain men who shaved clean and had their hair cut now and then, and there were a few of the young ladies who did not fear to waste their time over combing and brushing and their money on tonics and curling-pins. But these Conventionals were not properly in the picture. I should, I believe, call them rather, Unconventionals; for by their conduct they flew slap in the

64 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

face of ruling practice. It earned them the mild scorn of the bearded and the bobbed; but nothing more. This was Theleme, where everybody did as he or she pleased.

Again it is understood that the desire of prisoners is towards escape; they think fondly of their happy homes; they long to be again with their dear families. It was otherwise with the Hobbemites, who had, in most cases, escaped from their happy homes and dear families, and never wanted to see them again, except, possibly, for a week or so at a time, when a cheap holiday should be indicated.

Prisoners, for lack of other society, cultivate that of spiders and mice. The jolly Hobbemites had no lust for such dull company. They were very well content to cultivate the society of one another, about doing which there was no difficulty whatever. If you had any sort of a turn for sociability you could spend your whole time in talk. It was not hard to procure interlocutors. An acquaintance could be made on the stairs at midday; improved into friendship, over beer and bread and cheese, by half past one; and by tea time you were brothers, or sisters, or brother and sister. It was all very delightful. The place positively swarmed with kindred spirits. There were pianos, guitars, fiddles, banjos, lutes—only one lute, I think—and gramophones. To the gramophones you danced. It was not possible to “listen” to a gramophone. If you wanted music and couldn’t make it yourself, you got some other genius to play it on a musical instru-

ment; or you went to the gallery at Queen's Hall or at Covent Garden.

When you talked, you talked principally about Augustus John; but there were other subjects—the Influence, for example, of Cézanne upon Matisse, or the Influence of Rodin upon Ezra Pound; or the Influence of Charles Chaplin upon the Music of Upper Peloponnesia.

And there was Religion—the most amusing of all topics. Sooner or later you always came back to Religion. Inexhaustible, Religion was. It was always such fun to put your Creator in His place.

Or you discussed your work with the other fellow or, if you were in his room, he discussed his with you.

Then you talked about Augustus John again.

This is nothing like gaol.

The wares which are made in prisons are strictly utilitarian. Hobbema Studios turned out nothing that could be so described. From roof to basement it was vowed to the production of Beauty—very odd Beauty at times, to be sure; now and then indeed, excessively ugly Beauty—or so it seemed; but whatever you and I might have thought of it, in the eyes of its creators it was Beauty always, even though six months later they might very likely change their opinion and heartily despise it.

They were nearly all quite young, these creators. Hobbema Studios was cheap, and to the young artist cheapness of lodging customarily appeals.

They were all eager and had faith in themselves. To the young artist eagerness and faith in himself

66 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

are the *sine qua non* of existence. Lacking these things, he would not be trying to make a living as a painter. Hope burned brightly within their bosoms—I speak of the generality. Some of them were less eager than they had been; some were losing their faith; in some hope began to burn dim. These were the people who might be expected presently to disappear from Hobbema Studios. But their places would quickly be taken by newcomers, ardent, sure and optimistic, as it was proper for newcomers to be. Others left Hobbema Studios for better quarters. These were they whose faith in themselves began to be justified, in whom the faith of those who remained simultaneously began to dwindle.

You only left Hobbema Studios for two reasons; first, because you couldn't afford to live there any longer and secondly, because you could at last afford to live somewhere else. The place was, in truth, something of a pandemonium at times, and it was always very uncomfortable.

Ottilie's studio, into which you are now invited, was more like a well than a room, so small was the floor space and so high were the walls. It was papered in plain brown and it had one immense window. This window leaked drafts in a dozen places and stared out upon a churchyard, which had been converted into a playground for the bull-mouthed children of the poor. (The children of the poor are rather less bull-mouthed than the children of the rich. This is only because they are not so well nourished.)

One tiny corner of this room was caged in with glass and here were a gas-stove and a sink and a geyser. This was the kitchen of the establishment and also the bathroom.

The bedroom was constructed along one wall. It consisted of a bed, covered with a dark green djidjum. The effect was almost that of a sofa.

There was a cupboard on one side of the fireplace for crocks and groceries and another cupboard on the other side of the fireplace for clothing and sundries.

Elsewhere there were a square table, three wooden chairs, two arm-chairs, a suspension of incandescent gas, a crammed bookcase, a drawing-table, a trunk, a hat-box, a suit-case, and, in a corner, a stack of up-ended, unframed canvases. These were works by Reginald Octavius Wigmore, which Otilie was sentimental enough to keep, but not to hang. She could not admire her father's paintings. But remember that he had not himself admired them.

Knick-knacks and hung pictures there were none. A workroom, this.

II

Adkin had been sent to fetch some of his drawings. Otilie had taken no denial and had refused to listen to his protests that he had nothing to show. He had been packed off. No tea for Adkin, unless he did as he was told. Not a drop. The youth had submitted.

Mendoza sat where he had been put, in an arm-

chair between fireplace and window, watching Otilie prepare for her tea-party. His offer of help she had declined and he had not insisted. It was not for him, by fussing about, to get between his hostess and the pleasure she was taking in her proprietorship of this wonderful studio, this miraculous tablecloth, this magic kettle and gas-stove, these incredible tea-cups, tea-pot, sugar-basin, milk-jug; these prodigious spoons. This room was hers. This tea-party was her very first tea-party. These things were hers. By her hands alone must the sacred flame of the gas-ring be evoked, the kettle filled, the tablecloth spread, the tea-service lifted from its cupboard and set out. None but she must take the buns out of their paper bag, or butter and slice the bread. Only she must decide the position of the jam-jar. Who else might correctly estimate how the knives were to be adjusted in relation to the plates, or say where the potted ham was to go?

Not Mendoza. Because a man is a peculiarly pungent critic of Life, it does not follow that he cannot sympathise with the jealous pride of Youth in its first very-own establishment.

So he sat in his arm-chair, smoking his eternal cigarette and watching Otilie make her preparations, rejoicing in the delicate smallness of the girl, her brisk, sure movements, her little hands, her tiny ear, the sudden shooting out, at critical movements, of her red tongue's tip, while she sawed buttery paper-thin slices off the loaf.

"Exquisite!" he thought. "Entirely! And this

fairy proposes to take our big brutal world by the throat and rifle its pockets. Oh! the admirable, the adorable courage!"

He pulled out his sketch-book and began to draw. Soon he was lost in his work.

He drew a vast, obscene monster, half ape, half swine. It lay all its length, guarding a mountain of coin. Its cruel jaws slavered lustfully and its cunning eyes gloated upon a minute black and white bird that advanced stoutly to the attack, armed with a sharply-pointed pencil twice as tall as itself.

Behind him Otilie, when it was done, laughed suddenly and clapped her hands.

"You think it'll get me?" she inquired.

He hadn't intended her to see his drawing. Since she had: "It'll do its best," he said, "and it has got very many in its time. But I do not think it will get you. I think you will get it. I have only seen one of your drawings, though. Wait till I have seen some more."

"Do you think it'll get that boy, Adkin?"

"Probably," said Mendoza. "But I do not know anything about his work. I judge that he will be swallowed because he is soft. It likes soft things."

"I'm hard, am I?" said Otilie.

"You are definite," he said. "And you are vigilant. And you are going to tickle this monster's ribs. It likes that. I have done it for twenty years and I know."

"I don't want it to get Adkin," she said. "He's a dear."

70 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"He is soft," said Mendoza again. "I like him, too. I shall be sorry if he's eaten up."

"Wait till he gets back here with his stuff. If what I saw at Mr. Punchester's is a fair sample I should say *he'll* do some eating, if he ever gets started. I want to know what you think of his work."

"What is he doing for Punchester?"

"Book-covers. Wonderful things, I thought. I could have gone on my knees to them."

"You mean Punchester did not?"

"No, He didn't. He turned one down."

"Did he? Adkin told me he had nothing in his portfolio."

"Oh," said Otilie. "Mr. Punchester kept it, all right. To compare, he said, with the new one Adkin is to do. I don't like Mr. Punchester. Do you?"

"Not very much. He knows his business, though."

"Yes, I suppose he does. That's why I went to him first. It was very bold of me, I suppose; but I believe in flying high."

"And he has kept all your drawings too?" said Mendoza frowning.

"Oh!" she said, "I got his receipt for them."

"You did? Good for you, Señorita." Mendoza laughed and struck his knee lightly with his open palm.

"You see I'd heard things about Mr. Punchester. One does, you know. I've only been ten days in Chelsea, but I've made one or two friends in these studios. They warned me to be a little wary how

I left drawings in Mr. Punchester's hands. It seems it's not always very easy to get them out again. I wonder how many he has of Adkin's. Things that he's turned down, you know."

"Well," said Mendoza, "that is the young Adkin's affair. He seems to be quite satisfied with Punchester."

"Yes," she said, "I wish he didn't. I fancy that boy wants looking after. I've a good mind to take him under my wing."

Mendoza smiled and began to draw again under his other sketch. She fell silent instantly and leaned over to see. Presently Punchester, a sleek and bulbous cat, crouched, with claws unsheathed and teeth displayed, upon a heap of bones. Next, sideways-on to this menace and contentedly chewing a blade of grass, there sat an incredibly innocent and juicy-looking young rabbit. Finally, perched on a big stone, with open beak and eyes that emitted intimidating sparks, the tiny black and white bird resolutely faced the cat. Over the rabbit's body one small protecting wing was stretched.

Again Otilie clapped her hands and laughed.

"You think he'll swallow us both," she said. "He'd better try! I'll peck his ugly eyes out for him. Oh! you don't know how fierce I am really, when my blood's up. And it's not as if I can't do without Punchester. Poor old Adkin mayn't be able to, but I can."

He looked at her admiringly. "For a person of your size," he said, "you have an almost terrifying courage. Or is it that you do not know?" .

"Oh!" she said, "I know all right. Wasn't my father a failure at painting, poor dear? I'm going in to this with my eyes wide open. I don't expect to have everything all my own way. But it's not courage, Mr. Mendoza. It's nothing more splendid than an income. If you want to make that sketch of yours true, you ought to put me on a fat money-bag and mark it 'Two hundred a year.' There's nothing like two hundred a year of one's own for giving one a bit of confidence. Though I sometimes wish I hadn't a penny."

"Don't," said Mendoza dryly. "It is not at all nice to be without a penny. And it may not be always particularly good for one's drawing. If I were you, I should stick to my money like glue."

"Oh, Mendoza," she cried impulsively, "do you think I shall ever do anything? Do you? Do you?"

"Who knows?" he said. "How shall one prophesy about a girl? She marries—and with the first baby that the doctor brings in through the door, Art goes flying out at the window. I have seen it so often."

"I shall never marry," said Otilie.

"Of course not," said Mendoza comfortably. "That's understood."

"The kettle!" she screamed. It had boiled over.

While she was busy in the kitchenette he tore the leaf with the two sketches out of his book and wrote under them, "*Mendoza à sa conseil, Otilie. Hommages.*"

CHAPTER VI

I

RAYMOND ADKIN'S was a simple story, and may thus be summarised. Natural talent for drawing, prizes regularly won for it at school, natural disinclination for any honest method of making money, frowning father, sighing mother, twelve months for a scholarship won surreptitiously at local School of Art, resolution confirmed to have nothing to do with business, declaration of independence at age of sixteen, storming father, weeping mother, head-shaking relatives (one aunt alone sympathetic), compromise upon a year's trial at Art school, scholarship won at Gibbon's School, London, father decides that he has had enough of this damned nonsense, ultimatum, frightful scene, foaming father, fainting mother, relatives indignant (save always sympathetic aunt), ultimatum defied, paternal roof abandoned, metropolis receives young adventurer, two years at Gibbon's, exit, Metropolis invited to support young adventurer, Metropolis turns deaf ear to invitation, thin times for young adventurer, death of sympathetic aunt, legacy of one hundred pounds, young adventurer does himself and everyone he knows proud for two months and five days,

unexpected but opportune appearance in *The Palette* of two designs for fans by young adventurer, letter received from Punchester, first commission for book-cover, second commission for book-cover, further commissions for book-covers, continuance of commissions for book-covers.

This brings us to where we were a few chapters ago. They have brought us to where we are now. Those that follow will bring us to where we shall be at the end of them.

The young man in question had been quite sincere in saying that he had nothing to show. In his garret were a good many sketches for Punchester's book-covers, and a few more or less finished failures, and there was, of course, the usual heap of miscellaneous drawings and notes which every artist amasses because he thinks that, one of these days, he may be able to turn them to account. Among these was a packet of illustrations to *Tristram Shandy*, twenty-seven in number, some finished, but most of them only roughed in in pencil, on which the young man had been at work when Punchester first nosed him out. He had never shown these drawings to Punchester or indeed to anyone. He himself thought they were pretty good and it was an ambition of his to complete them; but the stern business of making his bread had forced him to abandon what he knew was a most unlikely speculation. It was not to be supposed that any publisher would care about producing a *Tristram Shandy* by a totally unknown Adkin. Punchester, in any case, was not a book-publisher and so long as his

appetite for covers should continue unsatisfied, Adkin saw no use in worrying the good gentleman with his illustrations. They would keep. They would keep.

But now he fished them out of their drawer in his wardrobe and looked them over. Yes, they were pretty good. And if he had got to take something round to that wonderful little Wigmore's place, he would as soon take them as anything else. There was, at least, a certain coherence about these *Shandys*. Rather better worth showing, they ought to be, than a scrappy selection of studies. And it would be interesting to hear Mendoza's opinion of them. Yes, they were pretty good. Yes, they might as well come along.

He tied them up, tucked them under his arm and descended to the street.

Half way to Hobbema Studios he passed a flower-woman entrenched behind her splendid baskets. He thought; "She'd like a bunch of those 'yellow roses.'"

"How much the yellow roses?" he demanded, halting.

The flower-woman named a price.

"Give me a dozen," said Adkin, and sought in his pocket for money. There was none.

"I'm broke," he shamelessly informed the flower-woman. "Keep those for me. I'll be back in ten minutes or so." He ran home. "The fiddle," he was saying to himself. "I can get it out to-morrow when I've cashed Punchester's cheque. He said he'd send it to-night."

He arrived breathless in his garret, looked about him for his instrument. It was nowhere to be seen.

A pang of terror shot through him. Then he remembered.

"I left it at Punchester's," he thought. "It's that girl's fault and her drawings. My mind was full of them when I left the house. Well, that's all right. I'll find it there to-morrow. Meanwhile I'm afraid there's nothing for it but Our Blessed Lady of Tê-hua."

He took down very carefully from the chimney-piece a small figure in white Fuchien porcelain of the mild and merciful Goddess Kuan Yin with her baby (that is to say, somebody else's) in her arms, a charming thing, a hundred and fifty years old, with which, while he was getting rid of his legacy, he had fallen in love in a second-hand-clothes-dealer's shop and bought for fifty-five shillings.

She was his Patroness and he never pawned her save when he was *in extremis*. All other things of the kind that he had taken unto himself during his brief period of prosperity he had relinquished without a sigh; but with Kuan Yin away he could not be happy. He had often gone very hungry rather than place Kuan Yin between the dirty hands of Mr. Simonds. Suppose the old wretch should drop her.

To-day, however, the risk must be run and that was all there was about it.

He slipped Kuan Yin into the inside pocket of his jacket and descended his five flights of stairs. Then he discovered that he had left his *Shandys* in his room.

Ten minutes later, Kuan Yin bestowed for the night, he stood again before the flower-woman. She handed him his roses wrapped up in a newspaper. He paid her and went on his way.

Presently he thought; "This is a devilish filthy, horrid old bit of paper that woman's given me. I must have something better than this round my flowers, hang it all!"

He whistled sharply to a boy, who, at this moment, came round a corner, yelling unintelligibly. The boy arrived and sold him a copy of the *Evening News*. Raymond cast away the wrapping of his roses; substituted the clean newspaper; marched on, well satisfied.

II

He found Otilie and Mendoza half way through tea.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said as he put the flowers down in front of Otilie, "but it was so hard to find anything worth showing you. I don't think I'd have dared to come if I hadn't thought of bringing these."

She buried her nose in her bouquet and looked at him with reproachful eyes. "I wonder you dared to come with these, you horrible boy," she said. "It was downright wicked of you. But oh dear, how lovely they are! They'll have to go in the water jug till I can get one fit for them."

Mendoza got up. "I know where that one is," he said. "Give me three minutes." He took his hat and darted out of the studio.

78 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"No," she wailed after him, "your tea'll be cold. Come back." But he was gone.

She shrugged her shoulders and spread her hands; then turned upon Adkin. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said, "wasting your money like that. Particularly on me."

"And why not on you particularly?"

"Because," she said, "oh! because, if you must know, and I don't see why you shouldn't—I've just told Mendoza—because I've got two hundred a year of my own, and so——"

"Splendid!" he observed. "But what's that got to do with it?"

"Oh," she cried, "how am I to say it? I'm enormously grateful of course, but don't you see that you mustn't buy flowers for me when you're—when—oh! I needn't pretend I don't know you're hard up, because you as good as told us so at lunch."

"But I'm not in the least hard up," he said. "Didn't you hear Punchester say he'd send me some coin to-night. I'm rolling in money, I tell you. I can make all I want at Punchester's. He's most convenient. I cash book-covers with him like cheques across a bank counter. There's at least twenty more ordered that I haven't even begun; and when they're done, he'll have more for me. He's got a big library. I do them just as I happen to need money. So the more I spend on flowers for you, the sooner I shall have to get busy on that new masque design for the Ben Jonson. I admit I ran things rather close yesterday, but a little fasting now and then clears the brain wonderfully and——"

"Oh," she said, "take your tea. There it is. I won't pry. But I wish you'd been more sensible. You want a keeper, as I've told you once to-day already. If you're not careful I shall appoint myself to the post and make you bring me every penny you earn, and dole out just so much as I think you really require. What have you brought to show us?"

"Just some illustrations. Very few finished, I'm afraid; but there was nothing else fit to be seen."

"Why not? Don't you ever work except when you have to? Don't you try the magazines?"

"Of course I do. I've done lots of things and sent them out. I've had a few taken and published too," he added, with simple pride.

"Well, the others—where are they?"

"Oh, they're out looking for a home somewhere. I don't know where they are. They'll turn up all right; or else they won't. Probably not. You see if you don't publish a drawing you don't have to pay for it, and it really comes cheaper to put it in a cupboard and forget to send it back. But probably that's not fair. I expect they mean to send my things back, only they're so frightfully busy in those offices, you know."

"But," she cried, "surely you write and demand to have your drawings returned."

"Yes," he said, "I write sometimes, but that costs stamps. And I call sometimes at the office, but that means bus-fare or waste of time and shoe-leather. One can't spend all one's days hanging about on the stairs of magazine offices. Fright-

fully busy men, editors. Frightfully." He seized a bun and bit it in half. "Never mind them," he said, with his mouth full. "Isn't Mendoza a fellow? Isn't he the most corking thing that ever happened? Good Lord! To think that this morning I only knew him by sight! I must tell you how I got to know him in the Park this morning. Listen."

He related the narrative of the Spanish Artist and the Helpful Old Gentleman. As he finished it Mendoza appeared.

The Spaniard carried a tall wide-mouthed vase of creamy crackle-ware, ornamented with a few delicate sprays of chrysanthemums.

This he deposited on the table. "There you are," he said.

Adkin knew that piece well. It had been standing on a Jacobean dresser in old Murgatroyd's window in the King's Road for the past six months. He could also make a fair guess at what Mendoza had given for it. His eyes bulged slightly, but he said nothing. He thought however: "What a fellow! What a fellow! Always understood he was a good sort, but he's an absolute egg. And what a perfect thing to put yellow roses in! The Lord send she doesn't smash it. I must give her a hint about its value one of these days."

Meanwhile Otilie had been gazing at the vase.

"Satsuma!" she said, picking it up. "Old Satsuma! How could you?" and Adkin decided that his hint would be unnecessary. "She knows," he thought. "Good girl. But she *would* know

things like that, or she could never have drawn that lacquer bed as she did."

"I'm glad you like it," said Mendoza as he began to roll a cigarette.

"Like it!" Otilie set it carefully on the table, and began forthwith to arrange the roses in it. She could say no more.

Mendoza sat down and drank up his tea. "Now then," he said, "who shows first? Señorita?"

"No," said Otilie, "I'm busy."

"Then Adkin. Hand them over, brother. What are they?"

"Illustrations to *Tristram Shandy*. Just ideas; not finished at all."

"*Tristram Shandy*, eh? Incomprehensible book. Too much for me altogether. I gave up at the twentieth page. No matter. Your illustrations will talk a language I can understand. So! Ah hah! Here is a good rotundo in a very notable wig. His name?"

"That's my Uncle Toby," said Adkin, getting on with his tea.

"I like him, your Uncle Toby. You can draw, Adkin. You can draw. This is good. It is even very good. And this—and this. My compliments, Adkin. Punchester is in luck to have you doing his book-covers for him. Ah! Here's one you've finished. Devilish fine, Adkin, the post-chaise. And the clouds. Admirable decoration. Señorita, come and look."

"In a moment," said Otilie. They were too much absorbed in what they were doing to notice

82 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

that her voice was not quite steady. They continued, the one to examine what the other handed to him, the other to hang upon the verdict of the one.

Ottillie was reading the newspaper in which her roses had been wrapped. The headlines that gave the principal news of the evening had caught her eye—and checked her heart. They said “Failure of Ardle’s Bank. Thousands ruined. City scenes.”

Since her two hundred a year had been wont to come out of Ardle’s Bank—every penny of it—Ottillie was just at present more interested in the newspaper than in any possible set of illustrations to *Tristram Shandy*.

III

She began to read the first of the two columns that stood below the headlines. “For some months now the position of Ardle’s Deposit Bank has been causing grave anxiety in well-informed financial circles, and the news that it has to-day suspended payment will hardly come as a surprise to——

Her eye strayed uncertainly back from the small print to the big. “Failure of Ardle’s Bank.” That was all that mattered. To whom the news would hardly come as a surprise was not very important, was it? And that grave anxiety which well-informed financial circles had been keeping so carefully to themselves for the last few months, was that a thing about which she need at present concern herself? It was the big black letters which alone seemed worth reading. They swam a little, but she

could make them out clearly enough. She knew what they said. They said that Ardle's Bank had failed. This meant——

She steadied herself, leaning with her two hands on the table, the two hands between which the newspaper lay flat spread. She swayed forwards, pushed herself upright again. She heard Mendoza say: "But, Señorita, you must come and look. Come and look, Señorita." It was as if he spoke at a great distance.

She stared vaguely in the direction of his voice and became gradually conscious that he and she were in the same room. Adkin too. Mendoza sat in the arm-chair, his head bent over a piece of paper that he held. Adkin stood beside him with a sheaf of similar pieces of paper in his hand. He was staring at the piece of paper that Mendoza had. Neither of them was thinking about Ardle's Bank.

"But come and look, Señorita," said Mendoza motionless and absorbed.

Adkin straightened his body and turned to her. His face was flushed and his eyes shone. He spread his fingers and ran them suddenly through his hair from brow to crown. "He likes them," he said hoarsely. "He says they're good. My God! Mendoza does." He saw nothing of the dismay that was in the girl's face. For him she was merely a person to whom he could announce that Mendoza commended his work.

This she realised, and, realising it, was herself again. Another girl would have cried: "What do I care what Mendoza or anyone else thinks of your

silly pictures? Ardle's Bank has failed. Do you hear? Ardle's Bank has failed." Ottilie didn't do this. For she had realised something else—to wit, that this was probably the greatest moment of Adkin's life, and that she must do nothing to spoil it. To her the last minute had brought disaster; to Adkin an unspeakable satisfaction. To intrude upon his raptures with her own tale of devastating misfortune would be a very horrid wickedness, not to be perpetrated. Not if she could help it. No, this great innocent, absurd, untidy boy—how shockingly he had rumbled his hair!—was not going to be robbed of his happiness. Not if she could help it. No. Decidedly not.

She found that she was standing quite firmly on her two feet. She could do without the table's help now. Good!

She exerted all her will and achieved a smile. Good!

She opened her mouth and said: "Splendid!" Good!

Adkin said: "This'll make old Punchester sit up when I tell him." There were tears in his eyes. Again he dashed his hand through his hair. He walked to the window, stared out at the grave-yard, breathed on the glass and rubbed it clear again.

Mendoza said: "This is great stuff, Señorita." He looked up, "What's the matter?" he demanded quickly and was at once on his feet.

She passed a hand over her eyes. "Nothing," she said, "I'm silly, I suppose, but I'm so pleased I wanted you to like his things. Those I saw this

morning, you know, I felt they were a bit out of the way. And now you confirm—" She broke off.

He glanced at her suspiciously. "Sure that's all?" he asked in a low voice. "Not feeling faint or anything?"

"Sure," she said. "Let me look at his pictures, please."

"Sit there," he said, pointing to the arm-chair. "Here they are. Adkin, come and show her what I've seen. Then we'll go on together."

Ottilie sat down, and glad enough she was to do it. She took up a drawing, fastened her eyes and her will upon it.

Adkin came from the window and began to explain it to her. Most of the roses lay on the table beside the Satsuma vase. Mendoza busied himself with getting those flowers into water.

Very early in this proceeding he discovered what the headlines of the newspaper said. He made no comment that was audible, but he stole one meditative glance at Ottilie and raised his eyebrows.

"*Dios!*" he thought. "If it should be so, what a heroine is here! But perhaps it is not so. Perhaps, after all, it was only the heat. Not too robust, that little lady. But if it should be so!"

CHAPTER VII

I

By nine o'clock next morning Otilie had made an appointment over the telephone for midday with the Righteous Man.

At ten minutes past twelve she was shown into his sitting-room.

She had not kept him waiting. It was the other way round. The kicking of heels is a sovereign antidote.

He received her affably but without enthusiasm. What this sudden reappearance foreshadowed he did not know, but he was prepared to hazard a guess that the Ardle's Bank business might have something to do with it. The girl had said that she had some money and it had been evident that this money had made her little back a bit stiffer than it might otherwise have been. Thought she would think his proposal over, did she? Plenty of time before her, had she? Wouldn't starve if she never sold a drawing, wouldn't she? And would let a man know when she was ready for his verdict, would she, thank her very much? And out through the door, with her chin up.

And here she was, back again, asking for an

appointment at nine in the morning. Very urgent, was it? Ho, ho! What, then, had occurred to take the stiffening out of her confident young back? Well, Ardle's had gone phut, for instance. It might be that. Again it mightn't. Ardle's was just the sort of rotten show that a girl of her age might have her money in. Orphan, most likely. Possibly with a painter for her father. Drew too well at her age not to have been taught early. Painters were the very fish for Ardle's net. High interest and no security, that was what painters scrambled for when they had cash to invest. Well, well, we should see. We should see. Not a doubt of it.

He offered her a chair—not an arm-chair—and himself sat down behind his writing-table. "Well, young lady?" he said. He leaned back and joined the tips of his fingers and thumbs.

Ottilie came to her point with characteristic directness.

"You've seen about Ardle's Bank, Mr. Punchester?" she said. "All my money was in it."

The Righteous Man smiled inwardly. What an extraordinarily damaging admission with which to begin a business interview! His opinion of this little Wigmore's cleverness fell abruptly. After that affair of the receipt he should have thought her gifted with more intelligence. But it appeared not. Well, so much the better.

He pulled a long face and brought his hands down quickly to the arms of his chair. "My dear Miss Wigmore," he cried, "you distress me infinitely, *you do indeed. Infinitely.* But these things are

always exaggerated by the Press. I have little doubt that all will yet be well. The other banks will surely come to the rescue. Surely. Some kind of reconstruction must be effected. Ardle's was a large business—branches all over the South of England. It's not as if it was a petty local concern. Depend upon it, matters will be arranged satisfactorily to everyone. There may be a short period during which you will be asked to forego your dividends or accept some lesser payment, but in the end—in the end, Miss Wigmore—we shall see the business placed once more upon a sound footing. I feel pretty confident of that. Yes. Quite."

"I don't," said Otilie. "It's kind of you to encourage me, Mr. Punchester, but you see I've read all the papers in the Free Library this morning. It was something to do while I waited to come along here. From what I can make out, it's a complete failure and we shan't get three shillings in the pound. At any rate they've arrested Ardle and two other men. That doesn't look as if the other banks were coming to the rescue. And I saw in at least two papers that there's not a chance of it. So as I don't happen to have a great deal of ready money, I thought I'd better come along and see you, since you've been kind enough to say that you like my work."

"Quite right, Miss Wigmore. Perfectly right. And, if I may say so, I value this confidence enormously. I regard it as a very great compliment. It shows me that you realise how willing I am always *to do anything* I can—anything of course that I

can, Miss Wigmore—to help young and talented artists to find their feet. Am I right in supposing that, in the circumstances, you feel a little anxious to begin, as quickly as possible, to make money by your drawing?”

He was—perfectly right. Otilie didn't trouble to tell him so.

“Mr. Punchester,” she said, “yesterday you proposed that I should do you another set of drawings, and said that you felt pretty certain that you would be able to use them in your magazine. You suggested that I should wait to come before the public until I could appear in *The Useless*. But you see that now I can't wait. Thank goodness the rent of my studio is paid till September. It might be worse; but it's quite bad enough. I can't afford to wait a year or eighteen months until you can publish me. I must start trying to sell my work now—at once. So I've come to you to get those twelve drawings of mine that you don't think quite good enough for *The Useless*. And I hoped that you might give me a few hints about the most likely magazines to offer them to. I'm sure you don't think that I don't value your proposal of yesterday. I do, enormously. But, as things have fallen out, I simply can't accept it.”

He folded his arms and gazed at her admiringly; nor was his admiration wholly unreal.

“Miss Wigmore,” he said, “you have put it most clearly, most ably, if I may say so. And, if I may say so, the courage and collectedness you are displaying *do you very great credit*. A young lady of

90 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

your age who has just received such a facer as you have might be excused if she lost herself in hysterical complaints and despairing lamentations. You do not so lose yourself. You rise superior to such follies and set to work with a resolute heart to make the best of a bad business. For I need no longer conceal from you that I am not so optimistic about Ardle's as I endeavoured at first to appear. You do not ask for soothing-syrup and I apologise to you for having offered you any. You look facts straight in the face and I will do the same.

"You want—you need—to make money at once, by your drawings. Good! But has it occurred to you,"— here he suddenly slapped his monocle into position in front of his artificial eye—"has it occurred to you, Miss Wigmore, that there are a very great many artists who are in exactly the same case as yourself?"

"Of course it has, Mr. Punchester."

"Has it also occurred to you that the offices of all the magazines are stuffed full of the drawings which reach them, by hand and by every post, from these aspirants."

"Well," she said, "I suppose they must get a great many things submitted to them."

"They do, Miss Wigmore. They do. Even *The Useless*, although its policy of never publishing the work of people who are not members of its nucleus is perfectly well known—even *The Useless* finds it difficult to deal with the flood of manuscript and drawings which continually pours in upon it. It is *this* superabundance of artistic genius, more than

anything else, which makes it so hard for an unknown writer or artist to get his work accepted." He stood up and began to walk about the room.

"Editors, Miss Wigmore," he said, "after all, are only human flesh and blood and they weary and grow callous and unresponsive under the strain of constantly examining would-be contributions. They gradually lose the power of acute judgment and tend more and more to rely upon the work of people whom they know the public will accept and less and less to make experiments. Suppose you leave these twelve drawings of yours with some magazine other than *The Useless*. What happens? Your drawings are seen and passed upon by some underling, who spends his whole life in looking at similar things. He regards your work almost with loathing. The chances are that he will see nothing in it and reject it at once. But if he discerns in it some unusual merit, the next man who reviews it is almost equally jaded, almost equally incapable of reacting to a novel stimulus. Again the chances are that he will turn you down. Believe me, Miss Wigmore, the drawing by an Unknown that forces itself so far as the chief editor's sanctum may congratulate itself on having accomplished a feat. A feat, Miss Wigmore. Yes, a feat."

He opened his mouth wide and suddenly and permitted his monocle to fall.

She looked at him bravely. "Well," she said, "my things must take their chance. There's no reason why they shouldn't. Other people's take *theirs*. So if you'll let me have my drawings——"

The Righteous Man laughed and beamed upon her. "And suppose I won't?" he said jocularly.

Ottilie went white. She had heard things about Punchester, you may remember. Then she be-thought her of his receipt and took heart.

"But you will," she said steadily.

"Not unless you compel me."

"Then," she said more steadily, "I'll compel you." And she thought: "How?" She was very much aware then of his power and her weakness. It would cost money to compel this man to do anything. And where was her money? Ardle knew perhaps.

II

The Righteous Man lay back in his chair and roared with laughter while she stared at him through narrowed eyes. Having given her the fright that he thought was her due, he explained himself.

"No, Miss Wigmore," he said, "I'm not going to steal them from you. This isn't the office of—well, I'll name no names. But I'll tell you what I *am* going to do with them—unless, of course, you compel me not to. I'm going"—benevolence clothed his voice as with train-oil and his smile became almost holy—"I'm going, Miss Ottilie, to publish them at once."

"Eh?" cried Ottilie, profoundly startled.

He opened a drawer and took out the "Lady in Bed" and the other works of his visitor. These he laid on the table and spread out in front of him.

"*Since I saw you yesterday,*" he said, "I've been

giving a good deal of attention to these drawings of yours. I must have spent a couple of hours or more over them. They're really astonishing—better even than I thought. I'm quite sure that you'll do finer things; but meanwhile these are quite good enough to go on with. When I told you yesterday that I didn't think them just exactly right for *The Useless* I was speaking out of the caution of an old hand. *The Useless* is a sort of religion with me, and I am very loth to accept any work for it without having weighed the pros and cons very carefully. And once on *The Useless* an artist is expected to stay on, as you know; and not only stay on, but improve and continue to improve. I think I wanted to make absolutely certain that you would do so before I committed myself. Well, I'm prepared to take the risk. And so you shall come in at once and this pretty 'Lady in Bed' shall go into the next number. But of course, if you prefer to try *The Prattler* with her——"

He paused and smiled and spread his hands and brought his fingers and thumbs together again. Even his porcelain eye beamed kindliness.

"B-but," she stammered, "there's no v-vacancy, is there? I thought there was no vacancy, Mr. Punchester. I mean, is there a vacancy?"

"There isn't," he said, "but there will be to-night; if, that is to say, you and I come to terms. Morton Carrick has been getting very slack of late. I've urged him to pull himself together, but he doesn't—or won't. I think he won't. I fancy he *imagines he'll do better for himself off The Useless*

than on. He won't. Others have thought so and found out their mistake. The cachet which *The Useless* gives its contributors is unique, Miss Wigmore. Unique is the only word. Unique. To-night Mr. Morton Carrick will begin learning his lesson. But of course it depends on you."

Ottillie looked suddenly anxious.

"You mean you'll sack him if I agree to come on?" she asked. "But I don't want that at all, Mr. Punchester. I shouldn't feel a bit happy——"

"Don't distress yourself, Miss Wigmore. It's only a matter of sooner or later. It's you or another. I'm done with Carrick. Done. Quite." He abolished Carrick with a rapid outward sweep of his two hands. "I can forgive anything in my people but deliberate slackness. I regard it as disloyalty to *The Useless*—I say nothing of myself. *The Useless* has made Carrick, and now he offers it poor work, work he has failed to place elsewhere. I'm sure of it. That is what I call disloyalty. It's sacrilege. It's worse than sacrilege; it's ingratitude—the unforgivable sin. I've been very patient with Carrick. I've begged him, urged him, warned him to reflect what he's doing. But he will have it so. He's been asking for it for months, and if he gets it now he's only himself to blame. So don't you worry about him, Miss Wigmore, creditable though such anxiety is to yourself; but say yes and let us welcome you amongst us."

"Well—" she said.

He clapped his hands like a child. "Capital," he cried. "Capital! That's settled. Isn't it?"

"I suppose so," said Otilie. "I don't see how I can refuse such kindness. But are you quite, quite sure——"

"Miss Wigmore, I am quite, quite sure. Then it's agreed. You undertake not to publish with any other magazine but *The Useless* before *The Useless* shall have produced the first of these drawings."

"Yes," said Otilie, "I agree to that. It'll only bind me for a month."

He didn't say what it would do. He allowed her to assume what she pleased. He proceeded:

"You sell me these twelve drawings for one guinea apiece; they are to be published, one each month, in *The Useless*, and thereafter to pass into my possession. And you agree to give me the refusal of all the work you may do during the next three years. If those terms are agreeable to you perhaps you'll sign the contract that I'll make out if you'll wait a moment."

He opened a drawer and produced a printed form. "Your full name, please," he said, poised his pen.

Otilie's guardian angel slipped up to her side and whispered in her ear. "Mind what you're doing," it said sharply.

Otilie nodded to show that she had heard.

III

"Mr. Punchester," she said, "I'm very ignorant of business and the prices that magazines pay, and I'm sure you're *treating* me as well as I can possibly

expect; but those drawings take me quite a long time to do, you know. I was several months over that set you have. Of course, I wasn't working the whole day and every day or anything like it, and I daresay I can do another twelve much more quickly; but I don't see how I can live if I only get a guinea for each I do. And I thought that magazines only bought the copyright of the drawings they publish."

He waved his pen. "Why," he said, "a guinea's a very fair price for the work of a totally unknown artist, Miss Wigmore; but it's true that a young lady like you can't be expected—*mustn't* be expected to rough it quite so much as a strong man. Shall we say two guineas?"

Ottillie perceived suddenly that the fellow wanted her drawings for his magazine, that he did not want her to take them to *The Prattler*. She nodded again to her guardian angel and said: "If you'd say four, Mr. Punchester, I should like it much better." She began at last to enjoy this talk.

He threw himself back in his chair. He blew out his lips at her and fixed her severely with his eye. "Upon my soul, Miss Wigmore," he said, "one might suppose that you aren't particularly keen on joining *The Useless*."

"Oh!" she said, "I'm keen as mustard on *that*. But I'm even keener on remaining alive, you know. And if I'm to keep my work abreast of the fashions, I shall have to go about a bit. I shall need an occasional lunch at the Ritz and a tea now and then at Rumpelmayer's and at least a coffee in the Carlton *lounge*. And I shall have to go to the theatre some-

times, if it's only to the front row of the pit. And I shall need to go to race-meetings sometimes, and it'll do no harm if I run over to Trouville for a week in the summer. I want to go to Monte Carlo too. You can't study rich women in a Chelsea studio, Mr. Punchester, you really can't. Of course, if I still had money it would be different. I could afford to work for nothing *then*."

"Damnation!" thought the Righteous Man. "Is this Genius or Simplicity? The girl hasn't a rap, and she uses it to raise her price. It's indecent. It's not done."

"Well, Miss Wigmore," he said, "there's something in that too. But four guineas I can't pay. You've no idea what *The Useless* costs to produce. If I paid everybody at the rate you suggest, the magazine would be bankrupt in a year—in six months, by Gad!"

"But," she said, "I don't ask you to pay everybody at that rate. Only me, you know."

He laughed—admiringly, in spite of himself.

"Three guineas is my last word," he said. "Take it or leave it, Miss Wigmore. I shall be sorry, if you leave it; not only for your sake, but for my own."

"Then," she said sweetly, "I'll take it. That's for copyright only, of course. I must retain the originals."

He scowled at her. He saw that if he wanted her he must let her have her way. "It's only the copyright I really care about," he said. "I generally buy *the original as well*, because it saves all possibility

of dispute afterwards. You shall keep your originals." He took up his pen again.

"And first refusal for only two years, please, Mr. Punchester."

He had no more fight in him. "As you please," he growled, and began to write. "Your full name and address, Miss Wigmore?"

She gave it to him. "And," she said, "while you make out that agreement, I'll just put my name on the back of my drawings. To save all possibility of dispute afterwards, you know."

He motioned to her to be silent. He could not trust himself to speak. His pen began to travel.

So did Ottilie's.

CHAPTER VIII

I

OTTILIE left the Righteous Man in the best of spirits. (Let there be no mistake. It was Ottilie who was in the best of spirits.)

To be reduced from two hundred a year, paid hitherto without fail, to what you can make by drawing is a blow under which Youth may stagger, but from which it will soon recover if there is any stuff in it. Age knows too much about the kicks which Life can deal out to be at all ready to relinquish the precious halfpence that have fallen to its share. Where her mother, had she been alive, would have sunk under the loss of her property, Ottilie, though for a moment she was submerged, had risen like a cork to meet Adventure. She was lucky, perhaps, in having some one to think about besides herself, what time the spread newspaper shrieked to her what had happened; and her instant resolve to keep her mouth shut and not take out of Adkin the good taste of Mendoza's praise carried her quickly through her first terror into a condition of something like elation. While she squatted in her big armchair poring over Adkin's drawings she found *soon enough that she was actually not affect-*

ing an interest in them. She began to see what they were intended to be; the things Adkin kept saying about the characters that he had drawn grew more and more intelligible; Mendoza's criticisms gained steadily in significance; until she discovered suddenly that she had been thinking altogether about the sketch she held and not about Ardle's Bank at all.

And at once she was her own man again.

This ruin which had come upon her was certainly a horrid nuisance. That was no reason why she should allow it to overwhelm her. She would have to go pretty carefully for a time, with only a pound or two of ready money to her name; but the rent was paid and her ivory things were worth ten pounds at least and she had her wrist-watch and several other possessions which could be turned into money. Say she could get even ten pounds on her valuables; ten pounds would carry her on for a good time. How long? Well, that remained to be seen. And of course she would simply have to go to work now to sell her stuff as soon as she could. A pity, if that meant giving up the plan Punchester had outlined for her; yes, but there were more ways to success than one. If *The Useless* wouldn't have her just yet, there were *The Prattler* and *The Looker On* and *The Day* and a score more good magazines to try.

And these drawings of this boy Adkin were really enormous.

She exiled from her mind not only Ardle's Bank *but the consequences*, as they related to herself, of

its failure. Time enough to think of all that when her tea-party should be over. Time enough to be gloomy when she should have no particular reason to be gay.

Yet, when Mendoza and Adkin had gone, she remained elate, unable to take a gloomy view of her future. The two hundred a year that came to her without any effort on her part was gone—probably, almost certainly. That meant that she must make it for herself. And so she would. To-morrow Punchester must be interviewed; her drawings recovered. Then hey! for the magazines and their editors. After what Punchester had said about her work she was not inclined to be too much alarmed at the prospect of showing it to his rivals.

Thus she got through the first of it and the worst of it. She slept that night like a little tree.

And now when she came down Punchester's staircase she had not only his contract in her pocket but a cheque for ten pounds as well which she had bullied him into giving her on account. The fact is that Punchester had grown terrified of her before she left him and had been well pleased to see the last of her. "Decidedly not a nice little girl," he had thought as he closed the door and sank into a chair.

Ottilie didn't care a snap what he thought of her. She thought very poorly of him. Trying to Jew her down to a guinea apiece! And he to keep the drawings too. Not for Ottilie! Not much!

I suppose that among all the victims of Mr. Ardle's ingenious but unhelpful manipulations of the *funds committed to his care* there was not one

102 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

who, on that fine July morning (the weather held nicely), faced the future with one quarter the confidence which possessed this particular young woman or less acutely than she regretted the disappearance of a serviceable income.

II

As Otilie reached the bottom of the staircase the hall door was opened by a maid, and Adkin, huge and uncouth, became visible on the step.

"I say, Bessie," he said, "I left my fiddle here yesterday. Can I have it?"

The maid lifted the fiddle-case from a chair.

"Here it is, Mr. Adkin," she said. "I thought you'd be round for it this morning." She gave him a pleasant smile. He gave her another and took his fiddle with a word of thanks. Simultaneously he perceived Otilie.

"Miss Wigmore!" he cried. "Here's luck!" He pulled his hat out of his pocket, put it on, took it off, advanced through the door upon Otilie, laid his fiddle on a chair and seized her hand. "Where bound?" he asked.

"Chelsea," she said. "Work!"

"Come and have an ice somewhere first."

She looked at him severely. "No," she said. "Certainly not."

"Certainly not? Why certainly not? It's the very thing for a hot morning like this. Well, if you won't, may I walk a bit of the way with you?"

"Yes," said Otilie, "you may do that."

"Good! Forward." He followed her on to the step.

"Your violin, Mr. Adkin," said the maid, smiling indulgently. He took it from her.

"Thanks, Bessie," he said. "You've saved me another journey. Here"—he dived a hand into his pocket and produced a shilling—"get yourself some peppermints, won't you? Be sure you think of me while you suck them. Come on, Miss Wigmore."

"That's the second time you've made me forget my poor old fiddle," he continued as he went down the steps by Ottilie's side. "Yesterday I forgot it because I was thinking of your drawings and to-day because I'm going to take you part way home. Are you really sure you won't have an ice?"

"I am," said Ottilie, "and I won't have you spending your money on me, do you hear? Those roses, for instance. It was downright wicked of you. You aren't fit to have money."

"Why? Because I spend it? What else is it for?"

"If you weren't hard up, and you are, you know——"

"Hard up? Hard up? What do you mean, hard up?" He put his hand in his pocket again and fished out a loose handful of silver. "Do you call that hard up?"

"Look here," she said, "you practically told me yesterday at the Café Royal that you'd had no dinner the night before and no breakfast. Of course *you're hard up.*"

"I admit," he said, "that things have been a trifle strained lately, but to-day I'm wallowing in wealth. Punchester kept his word. His cheque came this morning and I've just been to his bank to cash it. I always get it all in silver, you know. Looks more that way. See"—he groped in his pocket yet again, and his hand emerged struggling to contain the mass of coins it held. "There's three guineas there," he announced triumphantly, "all but that bob I gave Bessie."

She made a quick calculation.

"Three guineas," she said, "do you mean that was what Punchester sent you for those three designs?"

"Certainly," he said as he poured his money, or most of it, back into his pocket.

"A guinea apiece?"

"Yes. What of it?" he demanded and stooped to retrieve a shilling and a half-crown from the gutter.

"And does he keep the designs when he's used them for his books?"

"Yes, why not? They're no good to me. No one's going to buy a design for a book-cover to hang on his wall."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. Why should he?"

"Why shouldn't he? I'd be very glad to hang one of your designs on my wall."

"You would?" he cried eagerly. "I'll do you one. What book shall I do for you? I saw *The Path to Rome* in your studio yesterday. Let me

do that. I've got an idea for it. I'll begin it this afternoon. No, I'm fiddling with Stiles this afternoon. Well then, to-night. You shall have it on—what's to-day, Wednesday? Friday? *I dunno*. But say Sunday. May I bring it round on Sunday afternoon? But are you sure you'd rather not have some other book? If you're going to let me give you a cover I may as well do one you fancy. But I'll do *The Path to Rome* for you as well, in any case. I think you'll like it. My idea is——”

“Hush!” she said, “you're not to do me *The Path to Rome*, or anything else. The only book you ought to do is *The Road to Ruin*, if there is such a book. I think you must be a perfect idiot, Mr. Adkin. Don't you *want* to succeed?”

“Rather! I should say so. But what's that got to do with it? If I do you a book-cover it's not going to prevent me succeeding, is it? How long do you suppose it'll take me? Two days, perhaps, say three at the outside. What's three days? You talk as if I was an old, old man. But I'm not much over twenty yet. I've got plenty of time for 'succeeding.' But I suppose you don't really want that book-cover?” he concluded, evidently hurt.

She halted and laid a hand on his arm.

“Don't be an ass,” she said softly. “You know I want it.”

He became exasperated. “Very well, then,” he shouted, thus causing several passers-by to look curiously in his direction.

“Come on,” she said hastily. “We don't want a crowd here.”

106 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

He fell sulkily into step with her and they moved onwards in silence round the corner of Queen Anne's Mansions.

"All right," he said at last. "Have it your own way. I understand. I'll be good. But one'd think it was a crime to offer anybody a small present. That's one thing I like about Punchester. *He* never makes a fuss if I give him a sketch."

"I suppose you've given him plenty."

"Oh no. A few little things. No use to me. But they seem to appeal to him. He likes to have those rough notes by men who've worked for him. He says they're often more interesting than finished work. He's got an extraordinary collection of such things, quite apart from his pictures—a whole big chest of drawers, crammed with nothing but pencil sketches, mere suggestions many of them; and he's got another full of trial proofs of etchings in their various states. He's known a heap of artists in his time—all the best I should think—and they've all given him things—things they'd have otherwise destroyed. Some of them are magnificent. Why! those two chests of drawers must be worth a whole pile of money."

"I'm sure," said Otilie, "it was very kind of those artists to give him such valuable presents."

"Oh," he said profoundly, "they weren't valuable when they gave them to him. They wouldn't have been such fools. No, I tell you those things are just scraps that those men would have thrown away. I expect they were quite pleased to have *Punchester* cart them off with him. And if he likes that

sort of stuff, why shouldn't he have it? It's the least a man can do to give away a thing that's not worth a copper to him if a man fancies it who's been as helpful to him as Punchester's been to half the black-and-white men in London. At any rate, I should think myself a swine if I grudged him a pencil sketch when he takes a fancy to it."

"I see," she said. She decided that this was not the time to say more. The illusion which possessed this youth of Punchester's goodness to him was not easily to be slain. The work would have to be undertaken with caution and prosecuted with skill. But on this she was resolved—it should be done. She changed the topic.

"He's taken me on to *The Useless*," she said.

He stopped dead, shifted his fiddle-case to his left hand and held out his right. As she took it her heart stirred within her at the pleasure which shone in the face of this boy, whose principal ambition it was to be able to say the same thing of himself.

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow," he cried, and pumped her arm up and down. "I told Mendoza you ought to be on *The Useless* on the strength of that one drawing of the bed. Oh! Punchester's the clever one. He doesn't let a good thing go when he sees it. When do you go in?"

"Next number." She moved on as did he.

"And who goes out?"

"Morton Carrick."

"I thought as much. He's been asking for it this *three months*, the silly fool. They say his head's

108 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

swelled up so, lately, that he has to lie on his back to see the sun. And two years ago who'd ever heard of him? *The Useless* made him and now it's not worth his while. Poor chough!" He laughed scornfully. "I do hate that kind of ingratitude," he said.

"Yes," said Otilie reflectively, "Mr. Punchester seems to look on it that way too."

"Well, don't you? Just think what this chap Carrick was before Punchester discovered him. Nothing. A fine draftsman with an extraordinary imagination. Much too extraordinary for the magazines. They simply wouldn't look at him. He couldn't sell a thing, and kept himself alive by doing hack-work for jewellers' catalogues and the like. He had a cousin in the trade, it seems. Well Punchester hears about him somehow, sees his stuff and puts him on *The Useless*, and organizes a show for him at the Albemarle Gallery. And by the way, Punchester's going to have a show of my stuff one of these days somewhere. That is, of course, when I've done something really worth while. He's often talked of it. It's frightfully decent of him, don't you think? But I was telling you about this chap Carrick and all Punchester did for him. Well, he's so busy now he can't afford to work for the pay *The Useless* gives him, the dirty dog. And he's not the only one. Astley did the same and Ricks did and Peter Valenza did. It may be good business—though I don't fancy those chaps have found it so—but it's infernal disloyalty in my opinion, and disloyalty's the Unforgivable Sin. Thank goodness, *there aren't* many people like Carrick about; for if

there were, *The Useless* would have to shut up shop. It's only the loyalty of his people that allows Punchester to carry on at all. He counts on that. Naturally. And when he's treated as Carrick's treated him, he feels it, I can tell you. *The Useless* is a sort of religion to Punchester."

Ottilie could almost hear Punchester talking.

"I suppose," she said, "that he's got plenty of Carrick's rough sketches."

"Rather! And jolly fine things they are too. Oh! Carrick was only too glad to be decent to Punchester at one time. Why, at Christmas two years ago he gave him a whole set of six Nightmares—appalling things they are, and some of the best work he ever did. Of course, at that time, he had as much chance of placing them as I have of making the President's speech at next year's Academy banquet. I'll bet," he added with a chuckle, "he'd like to have them back now. He could get one hundred guineas apiece for them in America by holding up his hand."

"Why hasn't Mr. Punchester published them in *The Useless*?"

"Oh!" said Adkin, "he never publishes things that are *given* to him. That would be hardly fair, would it? No, he always pays for what he publishes. And so you're on *The Useless*. Well, well, *that's* all right."

III

They had now come into Victoria Street. Here a *newsvendor*, posted under the Windsor Hotel, dis-

110 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

played the green sheet of the *Westminster Gazette*. Across was printed large: "Ardle's Bank Failure. Latest."

The thing caught Otilie's eye. Adkin's too.

"That's a rotten business," he said gloomily. "They say it's the limit in the way of bust-ups. No one'll get a farthing of their money. Poor devils! It must be a frightful anxiety—money to invest, I mean. You never know what's sound or what isn't."

Otilie took a firm hold on herself. The pavement seemed to have become suddenly uneven, the sun to be blazing with a suddenly increased power, the noise of the traffic suddenly to have swollen into a bellow. Adkin was talking, but what he said was meaningless. She halted. Traffic coming out of Buckingham Gate afforded her an excuse. She caught at a lamp-post; clung to it. Her trouble began to pass.

"There's the Northern and Southern. That's Punchester's bank," said Adkin, pointing across the street.

"Is it?" she said dully. "Is it?"

"Shutters off still, all right," he said with a laugh.

"Are they?" she said. "So they are." She was able to abandon the lamp-post now. Still the traffic flowed into Victoria Street.

"Do you know," he went on, "I absolutely got scared about my cheque coming along this morning. Frightfully idiotic of me, but when one of these banks goes, you never know what'll happen next, do you? I tell you I was thunderingly relieved

when I found that place open, and it wasn't till I'd actually drawn my money that I felt quite happy. But I'm not much of a business man, you know, and I don't understand these things. I expect this Ardle show'll make no difference to a really big concern like the Northern and Southern, will it?"

The thought of Punchester's cheque in her hand-bag came into Ottilie's mind. Ten pounds! Very nearly all she had in the world. And if the Northern and Southern should fail to pay Punchester's cheque! And why shouldn't it? Ardle's had failed to pay *its* cheques. Oh! she must get her money at once! She must!

Ashamed of her terror but still possessed by it, she said: "We'd better part here, Mr. Adkin. You mustn't let me make you late for your lunch."

"Oh!" he said, "that's all right. It's a beef-steak pudding, you know, and the longer it boils the better it'll be. I'll just take you as far as Victoria. I want to get some chocolates there for Thisbe Sikes—the dearest of things, Thisbe—and some cigarettes for Ned. Dear old Ned! It's not every composer that would waste his time accompanying a rotten fiddler like me all afternoon."

The roadway was free now and they crossed it. The door of the Northern and Southern Bank was in front of her.

Suddenly she thought: "No! I won't be a coward. I won't. I won't. Here's this boy, with only three guineas in the world, I expect, and he's going to buy chocolates and cigarettes for his friends as *happily as if he had a thousand a year*. I'm on The

Useless. I'm on *The Useless*. And I'm simply not going to be pannicky. So now!" and she marched past the bank with her head in the air.

"You'd better come along o' me and have lunch with those Sikeses," said Adkin presently. "You'll love them. They'll be charmed to see you."

"Madman!" she said. "What a monstrous idea. Besides," she added reluctantly, "I've got to work." She longed to be able to go with him. A talk with a really nice woman was exactly what she wanted. It was very lonely in London she found. His suggestion, however, was fantastic.

His face fell. "Work?" he cried. "Oh! work be hanged! You're on *The Useless*. You're a made woman. A year hence you'll be a rich one."

"A year hence," she said, "isn't to-day. I've got to work, really. I've done nothing since I settled down at Hobbema. Absolutely not a stroke."

"Well, you'll work all the better if you come to lunch with these Sikeses. I tell you there's beef-steak pudding. Nothing to do really first-class work on like beef-steak pudding. You needn't stay and hear me scrape my fiddle. Just a few mouthfuls of beef-steak pudding. Just to save me from over-eating myself. Come now. Be a pal!"

"I won't be a pal!" she said, "if it means letting you foist me on to these poor friends of yours without a word of warning."

"They don't *want* any warning. They'll be enchanted to see you."

"*It can't be done*, Mr. Adkin," she said firmly.

"Well, if I let you off, will you be a pal?" he demanded.

"Yes," she said.

"Then don't call me Mr. Adkin, because I can't bear it. Call me anything you please but that; Raymond or Adkin or——"

"I shall call you Jones," she said.

"Right oh! Jones it is. Most respectable name, Jones. I shall call you Señorita, as Mendoza does. No, I won't. That's *his* name. I shall call you—dashed if I don't call you Smith."

"Good!" she said. "That's settled, then. Good-bye, Jones."

"Good-bye, Smith. Here's my chocolate shop. I shall have to run all the way to my lunch like a greyhound. Take care of yourself, Smith." He waved his hand and darted into his confectioner's.

Ottilie walked on to Chelsea. No buses for her at present!

CHAPTER IX

I

THAT evening's post brought Otilie a letter from the Righteous Man. It said:

"DEAR MISS WIGMORE,

"I am giving my last monthly *Useless At Home* for the Season on Sunday afternoon here between 3 and 6. Will you give me the pleasure of your company? Since you are to join *The Useless* magazine, you cannot too quickly become acquainted with your colleagues, most of whom will, I hope, be present. It is my custom to gather my contributors together from time to time. I think it is a good one. They thus meet not only one another, but also a number of critics, collectors and similar valuable persons, as well as fellow artists and authors who, though they are not connected with *The Useless* are none the less worth knowing. On Sunday I expect Sir Francis Lee, the President of the Guache Society, and Damon Sorel, whose play 'Grillons' has made such a hit in Paris. Also John Fosdyke, the etcher, whom I particularly want you to meet. Mendoza too has promised to be with us. He was in here soon after you had left me this morning and I told him that I hoped to see you at my little At Home. He was greatly interested to hear that you are joining *The Useless*, and I don't think I am violating a confidence if I tell you that he congratulated me very sincerely on that circumstance. May I say that I share this view?

"Most cordially yours,

"ALBERT PUNCHESTER."

Prodigious affable, the Righteous Man. One may guess, though, that the manner of his letter didn't truly reflect his sentiments towards Miss Wigmore. But Punchester was always civil to people who got the better of him; he reserved his rough side for those whom he had no reason to fear. And he feared Otilie. It made him uneasy to be in her company. She had a way of looking at him, pointedly yet sweetly, which made him uncomfortable. When she did it he seemed to lose a little of his belief in himself, to have a rather lower opinion of Albert Punchester than he usually had. It almost made him feel somehow mean. Not a nice feeling. He didn't like it. If Otilie's work hadn't been so original and so wonderfully competent he was quite certain that he would have declined to have anything more to do with her. It was really almost a pity that she should draw so well, because it was quite out of the question for him to let her go. There was money in her. Heaps of it. Not for him, though, he feared. He suspected that he would have to get up very early in the morning to catch Miss Otilie asleep. He certainly didn't flatter himself that he was going to get any of the young woman's work for nothing. However, he was going to get it pretty cheap for *The Useless*, though not quite so cheap as he'd intended. But when *The Useless* was in question one had to stretch a point. One simply had to. And *The Useless* couldn't afford to let an artist of Miss Wigmore's ability go elsewhere.

Not a nice little girl. No!

A little girl, however, to propitiate.

Flattery, though no use as an antidote to self-confidence, is a valuable weapon.

If, for instance, he could get properly on the right side of the girl she would, when it came to selling her original drawings, possibly let him have them at a reasonable figure. She wouldn't want to be too hard on an old friend, confound her! Whereas, once let her get her knife really into you, and while she would continue, no doubt, to send in work to your magazine, you might give up any hope of buying her originals for a penny less than she could get for them elsewhere.

Some, nay, most of this, Otilie managed without much difficulty to read between the lines of the Righteous Man's letter. By this time she had taken his measure pretty thoroughly. She knew him for a sweater and a cadger and a smiling humbug and she abominated him. The thought of all those wonderful fresh things that wonderful fresh, silly boys had allowed him to steal from them filled her with rage and loathing. And the admiration for him which Raymond Adkin—that good, simple idiot—displayed caused her, whenever she remembered it, to grind her little white teeth together.

And now as she read Punchester's prettily written letter—he had paid her the homage of a holograph—and perceived how he could fawn upon her whom he had tried and failed to diddle, and because he had failed, she swore for the twentieth time that she would somehow put a spoke in the wheel of his *intentions* towards her young friend.

Yes, Jones wasn't man enough for Punchester, that was certain. If it depended on Punchester, poor dear old Jones would go on designing his priceless book-covers at a guinea a time until the cows came home. Often talked of getting up a show for Jones, had he? Nothing more likely. Punchester was the sort of man who would be particularly good at talking. But doing? Not he. Perhaps in ten years time, when Jones would have done him about £10,000's worth of drawings for about seven and sixpence, he might think it worth while to put the poor soul on *The Useless* and get up a show for him and "make" him. In fact he'd have to, if he meant to get his proper money's worth. For unless Jones became famous all these book-cover designs would be worth precisely nothing—or not much more.

And Jones admired Punchester, was grateful to him, swallowed all his chat about ingratitude and disloyalty, quoted him, thought him the finest of fellows, the most generous and encouraging of employers. Pah! Bah! Tchah!

And Jones talked of the day—the remote day—when he, Jones, should at last do something really worth while; something upon which Punchester should at last look approvingly.

With all those book-covers to his credit, to say nothing of his *Tristram Shandys*!

Tchah!

Bah!

It was enough to make you beat your head against the wall.

118 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

Somehow something must be done. But how? And what?

There could be no harm, at any rate, in being polite to Punchester. Besides, for herself, it might be sound business to go to his At Home.

She took her pen and wrote a short but amiable reply, accepting.

And on Sunday she clad herself for battle in her black and white harness and presented herself at Queen Anne's Gate on the stroke of four.

II

Now I don't propose to give you Punchester's party in detail or at any length. We have had enough of that sort of thing. So what the Great Bohemians who were there congregated did and all the devilish clever things they said to one another, you will not hear from me. I shall not even catalogue their names for you. It is enough if I say that there were a great many most extraordinary persons present and that their conversation was uniformly prodigious. After that it would be sheer lunacy on my part to attempt to report them verbatim. What a great man says is generally great only while he is saying it. Written down, it loses such a lot—sometimes quite ninety-nine per cent. I can't think why this is so, but it is so. At any rate, it is much better that you should imagine their words for yourself.

But stay! It occurs to me that you may think

I am shirking my job or that I can't do it. I don't want that at all. I am a thoroughly conscientious fellow and Heaven forbid that I should seem to be ca'ing canny. And when it comes to writing the talk of brilliant men, I flatter myself I can do it as well as anybody.

So lest you should be harbouring any thoughts of this kind, you shall have a few samples of first rate Bohemian dialogue at once, and then we shall be able, I hope, to get on with our tale.

.

Said Benhope Pyle to Dempsey Wilding: "This is a damn good champagne that Punchester's giving us."

And Dempsey said: "Yes, it is, isn't it?"

And Pyle responded: "I believe you."

After which Richmond Yelverton observed: "Decidedly."

In another corner Leo Lempster was saying to Andrew Fothergill: "Did I see you in Garrick Street yesterday, Andrew?"

To which Fothergill replied: "No."

"Ah," said Leo, "then it must have been somebody else."

"Yes," said Andrew.

Elsewhere George Patterson said: "Robbie, old boy, are you doing anything to-night? If not, come and take pot-luck with Elspeth and me."

"Splendid!" said William Robertson. "What time?"

120 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"Oh," said the other, "7:30 as usual."

"Splendid!" said William Robertson. "It's a bet."

"I said," said Maria Monk, from one end of the sofa in the drawing-room, "you are insolent, and since you want to go at once you shall."

"Quite right," said Cora Pearl, from the other end. "Once they've been insolent the only thing to do is to get rid of them immediately. Otherwise you're asking for it."

"How I hate them!" said Miss Monk.

"So do I," said her friend.

These were the two cleverest women in London. Now then.

.

At these parties of his Punchester was always at his very best. "My *Useless At Homes*," he called them. He had instituted them shortly after founding the magazine which, by making famous, he had made himself famous; and he had held them monthly—except in the August and September of each year—ever since without a break, for the Righteous Man was never ill.

Beginning in a couple of rooms with the Original Nucleus and a few not very notable ornaments of Society, the Drama, Politics and Finance, they had gone on from strength to strength, even as the magazine had gone, until now, had Punchester issued invitations to all who desired to attend them, he would have been compelled to hire something

like Olympia for his guests. Rigidly exclusive though he was, the house in Queen Anne's Gate was always crammed to suffocation whenever a *Useless At Home* took place there.

Punchester loved his At Homes and never grudged money to them, though, in subtle compliment to the conversational powers of his guests, he never had anyone to sing to them or recite to them or do anything else to them that might seem to call for attention. A little, buzzing Balkan or Javanese band or some string trio that happened to be making a name for itself might be tucked away in a corner somewhere. Nothing more. The food and drink were always divine. Punchester's sandwiches enjoyed a reputation of their own throughout ten continents.

He loved his At Homes. His annual balance sheets always told him an agreeable story, but theirs could not rival the flattering Serial that the At Homes, month by month, whispered to his soul. It was pleasant to own a world-famous and highly profitable magazine; it was intoxicating to be the Host of Queen Anne's Gate. The Really Successful Snob—is there a happier mortal? No—not, at any rate, while his successfulness is being demonstrated.

His At Homes demonstrated Punchester's successfulness beyond all possibility of question. He loved them. They made him glorious. He appeared to shine as he moved, debonair, faultlessly attired, immense, marvellous, about his thronged reception-rooms. Nobody could have taken Punchester for

120 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"Oh," said the other, "7:30 as usual."

"Splendid!" said William Robertson. "It's a bet."

"I said," said Maria Monk, from one end of the sofa in the drawing-room, "you are insolent, and since you want to go at once you shall."

"Quite right," said Cora Pearl, from the other end. "Once they've been insolent the only thing to do is to get rid of them immediately. Otherwise you're asking for it."

"How I hate them!" said Miss Monk.

"So do I," said her friend.

These were the two cleverest women in London. Now then.

.

At these parties of his Punchester was always at his very best. "My *Useless At Homes*," he called them. He had instituted them shortly after founding the magazine which, by making famous, he had made himself famous; and he had held them monthly—except in the August and September of each year—ever since without a break, for the Righteous Man was never ill.

Beginning in a couple of rooms with the Original Nucleus and a few not very notable ornaments of Society, the Drama, Politics and Finance, they had gone on from strength to strength, even as the magazine had gone, until now, had Punchester issued invitations to all who desired to attend them, *he would have been compelled to hire something*

like Olympia for his guests. Rigidly exclusive though he was, the house in Queen Anne's Gate was always crammed to suffocation whenever a *Useless At Home* took place there.

Punchester loved his At Homes and never grudged money to them, though, in subtle compliment to the conversational powers of his guests, he never had anyone to sing to them or recite to them or do anything else to them that might seem to call for attention. A little, buzzing Balkan or Javanese band or some string trio that happened to be making a name for itself might be tucked away in a corner somewhere. Nothing more. The food and drink were always divine. Punchester's sandwiches enjoyed a reputation of their own throughout ten continents.

He loved his At Homes. His annual balance sheets always told him an agreeable story, but theirs could not rival the flattering Serial that the At Homes, month by month, whispered to his soul. It was pleasant to own a world-famous and highly profitable magazine; it was intoxicating to be the Host of Queen Anne's Gate. The Really Successful Snob—is there a happier mortal? No—not, at any rate, while his successfulness is being demonstrated.

His At Homes demonstrated Punchester's successfulness beyond all possibility of question. He loved them. They made him glorious. He appeared to shine as he moved, debonair, faultlessly attired, immense, marvellous, about his thronged reception-rooms. *Nobody could have taken Punchester for*

you will understand why I couldn't hesitate. Lord Froling," he explained to Otilie, "is a connoisseur with a very large C. He will appreciate your work."

This was Otilie's cue to become excessively pleasant to Lord Froling. A connoisseur with a very large C can of course be merely a Connoisseur; it is, however, very likely that he is also a Collector with a large bank account, a Purchaser, in short, to be propitiated with the very sweetest smile of which a young lady with pictures to sell is capable.

Lord Froling peered down at Otilie out of his red-rimmed eyes and thought her quite a delicious little person. Very. He adjusted his pincenez. "I hope," he said, "I hope very much that Miss Bignell will——"

Otilie put down her teacup, turned her back on Lord Froling and walked away. She had not caught this stupid-looking old man's name at her first hearing of it. At its third announcement she became aware that the detested head of her mother's detested family stood before her.

Immediately afterwards he stood behind her.

The Righteous Man paled. Good God! Why had this terrible girl ever come into his life? God God! Froling, Prince of Collectors—Froling, Patron without peer—Froling to be treated so! Left with his mouth open and not even a sandwich to put in it.

"Dear me!" said Lord Froling. "A civil young lady as ever I met. A most agreeable addition to your Nucleus, Punchester?"

"*I simply don't understand it,*" said Punchester.

"I simply don't understand it. Simply. Absolutely. No." He stared after Otilie's retreating form with one basilisk eye.

"A Socialist, perhaps," said Lord Froling. "Young Chelsea doesn't like my unhappy title, eh? A dreadful thing to be a lord nowadays, Punchester. We are rapidly becoming impossible. I wonder we still get asked about." He dismissed the incident with a shrug and left Punchester and drifted away to get a glass of champagne.

The Righteous Man, dissembling his rage, moved once more among his guests. Not, however, in search of Otilie. On the contrary, he felt that if he should encounter her he might have a scene with her. So he kept his eye open for her warily, and the next time he saw her she was talking to Mendoza.

He let her talk.

He was done with her, save, of course, in the way of business. Done with her. Absolutely. Quite.

Damn her!

IV

Otilie was telling Mendoza about the awful thing she had done.

" . . . I'm afraid," she was saying, "that Mr. Punchester will never forgive me. From the way in which he pronounced the sacred name of Froling, it's clear that he values my good uncle tremendously. Well, I can't help that. He oughtn't to have done it *without warning me*. But I suppose he could

hardly be expected to know that I don't speak to Frolings. What really annoys me about the incident is that I got no tea. If you truly want to be kind and helpful, Mendoza, you'll take me back to those twenty-five kinds of sandwiches that Mr. Punchester told me about."

"Come on," said Mendoza. "I have just eaten, I think, eight of them, but I will join you in another dozen or so. They're worth your attention, *Señorita*. Punchester's a great man. He knows good drawing and writing when he sees them, and he's invented not less than a hundred and forty-seven new sandwiches. They ought to put a statue up to him. I would be proud to design it."

"And how would you have it?" she asked as they forced their way down the stairs.

"I don't know," he said. "How would you?"

"Eating sandwiches," she said in his ear. "Twenty-four kinds, each labelled with the name of a member of the Nucleus."

"Rather too much for marble," he replied with a laugh. "But I will draw it for you."

"You will? Mendoza, you're a darling. It shall be my chiefest treasure. You'll make him very horrible, won't you?"

"Execrable. Have no fear. But I must make him choking on *you*, I think. That must have been a most dreadful business for him just now. The *affaire* Froling-Wigmore, I mean. But before we discuss that I must settle you comfortably. Here is a corner for you. I will go and get your tea."

"*Señorita*," he said when he came back, "I have

not yet congratulated you on your promotion. I have only been able to congratulate Punchester so far. Those other drawings of yours I saw here the other day—they are colossal. *The Useless* is in luck."

She put out a small hand and pressed his.

"I'd rather hear you say that," she said, "than anything in the world, I think."

"And now," he went on, "I want to tell you what I think of your treatment of Froling."

"Ah!" she said, "about that. If you don't mind we'll treat my relationship to that person as a confidence. I'm not particularly proud of it, but that's not altogether my reason. Lord Froling is, I understand, a rather important person in the Art World. I don't want to have him as an active enemy. I've offended him quite sufficiently as it is. I can't expect his patronage. But if he finds out why I cut him—that is, because he's my uncle—he's quite fit, I fancy, to try to stamp me under. At present he probably just thinks of me as a young person with bad manners. He missed my name altogether. He'll have forgotten all about me by to-morrow. But if he learns that I'm his niece, goodness knows what the malicious old object may do. It'd be gall and wormwood to him to see my father's child succeed."

"I think you're very wise," said Mendoza.

"But in my treatment of him just now—you think I'm an idiot."

"Not at all. You were quite right and you'll never regret it. When I was a little boy I, too,

128 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

spoiled all my chances in life by grossly insulting a valuable uncle who had treated my mother badly. I've never regretted it. Such uncles ought to be insulted and the more grossly the better."

"The Frolings are pigs," she said. "They'd have let my mother starve rather than lift a finger to help her."

"I daresay she'd have starved rather than ask them for help."

"I should say so," cried Otilie. "But she didn't have to, thank goodness! Oh! she didn't need to worry about the Frolings. She had quite enough to worry about without that, poor darling. My father and me, for instance, and the rent and our food and everything else. My father wasn't exactly a money maker, you know."

"If he taught you to draw," said Mendoza gently, "he did enough for any man to be proud of. Please tell your mother I said so."

"Oh," she said, "but she's dead too."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"You couldn't know. Yes, she died early this summer." Suddenly; "Thank God!" she exclaimed. For the first time it had occurred to her to wonder what she should have done to-day had she had an invalid mother to provide for as well as herself. Yes, this much was to be said for Ardle—he had postponed his failure until after her mother was beyond the grasp of destitution.

"Thank God?" Mendoza echoed.

"Yes," she said, "thank God! Her money was *all in Ardle's Bank*, you see, and she had been ill for

years. We couldn't have got on at all if she'd been alive to-day. I'd have had to see her go without her proper food, her medicines, her comforts—Oh! I couldn't have borne it, Mendoza."

"Do I understand," he said, "and I don't ask out of curiosity, I assure you—that *your* money was in Ardle's Bank then?"

"Yes, every penny. I don't mind telling you now. And to say the truth I don't much care—not now. It was rather a jar at first, but I'm used to it now and I'm not worrying any longer. Why should I? I'm on *The Useless*. I'm a made woman, according to Raymond Adkin at any rate." With that she began to wonder if Adkin was at this At Home. She hadn't seen him. But among so many people——

"By God!" said Mendoza to himself, "it was as I thought. The little Paladin! Not a syllable to show us what had happened to her. A jar? I should say so. She was as white as paper. And, two minutes afterwards, going through Adkin's illustrations with us as if they were the only things that mattered on earth! And to-day she refuses to speak to Froling. What a girl! I didn't know they made them like that and I've seen a girl or two in my time."

"Look here, Señorita," he said, "you take this loss of yours bravely, but will you or won't you think me very impertinent if I suggest that you may be going to find things a little difficult for a time? I do not believe that what you will earn on *The Useless*—*apart from glory*—will be anything very big.

130 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

Our friend the Sandwich-Eater is not exactly notorious for generosity to his contributors. And so——”

She smiled up at him and patted his hand.

“And so you want to lend me a whole lot of money, don’t you?”

“Why,” he said, “between friends that is surely nothing to make a fuss about. Just fifty pounds or so, to tide you over. As soon as you appear in *The Useless* you will be marked and the editors will be very glad to have your things. Come! Just for a few months. It is not necessary for you to go short of—well, of chocolates perhaps—simply because you happen to be a girl and I do not happen to be a woman. If I were a woman you would let me lend a hand, I think.”

“Mendoza,” she said, “I always heard you were a dear and now I know it. But it’s not necessary. It really isn’t. I’ve got plenty to go on with. Why, quite apart from the ready money I had by me I’ve dragged ten solid pounds out of Punchester as an advance on the drawings he’s taken for *The Useless*.”

“You did that?” cried Mendoza. He never insisted.

“I did that,” she said. “I’m rather proud of it.”

“I shall have to revise my idea of you and that poor devil,” he observed. “I think I shall change that drawing I promised you just now. I believe I shall draw, not Punchester choking on you as a sandwich, but you as the black and white bird we know of, swallowing a fat worm that will be just as *like Punchester* as I can get it.”

"No," she said, "not yet. I can make him choke a little perhaps, but I'm not up to swallowing him at present. He's big, is Punchester, and I'm very small potatoes as yet. But who knows? I may do it one of these days, and when I do I'll let you know. Then you shall do me another drawing to hang beside the Sandwich-Eater. Do you know if Raymond Adkin is here?"

"Not he," said Mendoza. "I met him in the King's Road this morning and asked him if he was coming. He said Punchester doesn't ask him to these At Homes. He supposed it was because his clothes aren't good enough. A simple soul, Adkin. No false pride about him. He knows perfectly well why Punchester leaves him out, and he thinks none the worse of Punchester. Not a bit. 'And they aren't, you know,' he told me. 'Are they?' He asked and turned himself round to show off his threadbare jacket. A good lad."

"He's a darling," she said. "But he's an idiot just the same." She related the history of their walk from Queen Anne's Gate to Victoria.

"No," she concluded bitterly, "Punchester has very little use for threadbare jackets in Queen Anne's Gate when he's got a *Useless At Home* on. But when it comes to getting that boy's glorious book-covers out of him for next to nothing, he's glad enough to open his door to him."

"Well," said Mendoza, teasing her. "Adkin is all right now. You have adopted him, haven't you?"

"*Absolutely.*"

132 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"He is coming to dine with me and play his fiddle to-night."

"Mendoza!" she cried. "*You're* not going to adopt him too?"

"Good heavens, no! That young man is your property, Señorita. I only asked him because I like to see him eat. It is as if he was all hollow. I used to be able to put food away like that myself, and it makes me feel young to watch him at work. Besides he is good fun and his drawings interest me too. I would like to see him get on."

"You *have* adopted him!" She clasped her hands. "Oh! Mendoza," she said, her eyes entreating him, "if you would! You could do such a lot for him. I want to see that boy get on too. So much."

A thrill—a pang—shot through the Spaniard.

"Good God!" he thought, "what's this? What's this?"

And at once he knew what it was. It was Terror. It was Jealousy. As Ottilie had spoken he had felt a sudden, hot hate for Adkin flood along his veins. That she should care for the fellow like this! There were tears in her eyes. Like great brown stars, they looked. And her voice. That she could use such a voice when speaking of an Adkin, a clumsy hobbledohoy like Adkin, a half-fledged, light-headed young clown who—who— It was absurd. It was fantastic. She couldn't care for Adkin. Not *Adkin*. She couldn't. By God, she shouldn't.

"I'm sorry for him," she said. "He's such an *innocent*. A perfect Babe in the Wood. And such

a nice generous thing, Mendoza. Do you know he wanted to give me a book-cover? Proposed to take two or possibly three days over it. Three days on a book-cover for me; and Punchester pays him only a guinea each for them. And look at those flowers! And the other day he was laying out his poor little money on chocolates and cigarettes for the friends he was lunching with. He's simply not fit to look after himself. Can't you and I help him a bit? I can't do anything practical, of course, but I can perhaps at least prevent him from wasting his time and his money. And his stuff is really splendid, isn't it? He's worth helping."

Mendoza passed a hand slowly across his eyes.

He no longer hated Adkin. Why should he? She was sorry for Adkin, anxious that he shouldn't be plundered, admired his work, was touched by his little generousities, wanted to help him. Why should he hate anybody for whom she was sorry, for whom she was anxious, whose work she admired, whose little generousities touched her, whom she wanted to help? She didn't love the boy. That was the thought that had gone through him like a knife—that she loved Adkin. But he need no longer trouble about Adkin. There was something bigger than Adkin for him to think about.

He, Mendoza, loved this small girl.

It was a revelation. Till this actual moment he had had no faintest suspicion of the truth. He had delighted in her fair beauty, been captured by her *daintiness*; *had* admired her cleverness, and ap-

134 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

plauded her honesty; her courage had warmed his heart; her silence under a great and sudden misfortune had amazed him.

But hitherto every impression had seemed to be isolated. No cumulative effect had apparently been produced.

And now the single suspicion, suddenly presented, that she was in love with Adkin had set alight within him the flame of a devouring jealousy; and, with that, he knew beyond all doubt what had happened to him.

Mendoza was a Spaniard; he was very much nearer forty than thirty; he was a famous man; he had lived in many lands and cities, and wherever he had gone he had met all sorts and conditions of people. It is not to be supposed that such a man knew nothing of women. They had been his friends; they had angled for him; they had thrown themselves at his head; they had cherished him; they had denied him; they had betrayed him; they had done most things but tread on him. He knew them as a man, as a painter, as a comrade, as a student of humanity. But he had never wallowed. His affairs had been few, considering the temptations of his fervent life, and all had ended quite happily, quite definitely, quite without regret, so far as he knew, on either side. Never had his heart or his fastidious taste found perfect satisfaction. Always from the first moment he had been able to imagine the dawning of the day of separation. Not yet had the whole of the man been bound. For not yet had he *met the woman* in whom he had felt he could put his

whole trust. Always, always there had been a lurking doubt.

It was trust that he required; trust, in man or woman. Lacking that, though there might be all else, there was really nothing. Life had robbed him of many beliefs encumbered with which he had entered upon it. Not many remained now. Not many. To one, however, he still clung valiantly. Still he believed that faithfulness was discoverable among men; not easily; hardly; but he had come across it sufficiently often to know that it was there for the seeking. And still he hoped that he should find it among women. But he no longer sought for it. He was not particularly concerned to find it.

He was well satisfied to dwell alone, save for his man Anfitrión. Alone he had long supposed he must always dwell. The thought was in no way painful to him. He was very well pleased to be single. It left his elbows free. He could come and go as he listed, having to account to no one for his employment of his time. He could work when he wanted to work and he could idle if idleness attracted him. All his responsibilities were, as they say, under his own hat. He could make or spend money as he wished, clothe himself in accordance with his own fancy; furnish his home handsomely, shabbily, or, if he pleased, not at all; know whom he liked to know; entertain whom he would entertain, and shut his door on whom he would shut it. If women were content to be his comrades, he was content to accept them in that capacity. He did not crave to *appoint any one of them to an exclusive perma-*

nency in his regard. They were charming creatures, but their charm was fugitive. They adorned existence, but were not necessary to it. They were possibly a refining influence; they were certainly not an imperative requirement. He could do very well without them, he and his Anfitrión. He had been born to be a worker, not a husband. Art was the perfect mistress, infinite in her variety, eternally elusive, never wholly captured, never cloying, never false.

Very much the bachelor was Luiz Mendoza; very much indeed the thoroughly contented, quite unrestricted little single gentleman.

So now he passed his hand across his eyes slowly, slowly, and stared almost stupidly at this girl whom he knew that he adored. The truth is, he was a little dazed. It was as if a great blinding light had been thrown upon him out of darkness. He knew, but he could not immediately realise.

His heart began to beat strongly. A great peril escaped does that to a man or a great unlooked-for joy.

He thought: "You're mine. Sound to the core and sweet all through, God bless you! You're mine. Praise to God! Here's the right one at last. That Adkin! She's not for him. She's only taken command of his future; means to pull the strings for him, shove him up the ladder, pat him on the head and herself on the back whenever he fetches home a prize from school. Admirable Adkin! I love the fellow. If she wants my help for him she shall have it. My soul is hers, and I never guessed it. Yet

of course I only came to this damned party to see her."

"You *will* help him," she asked again, made anxious by his silence. "A word from you to an editor——"

"Señorita," he said, a little hoarsely. "I approve your work of piety. Adkin shall be rescued from the person who is in both our minds, if Mendoza can achieve it. His stuff ought to sell easily if it is put before the right people. But the boy must co-operate with us. The point is, will he? I fear he lacks seriousness."

"He's a perfect imbecile," she said. "I could beat him. He's just waiting until Punchester pronounces him good enough for *The Useless* and he'll wait quite happily for a hundred years. He's sent in a few drawings to the magazines and seems to think it quite as it should be that he never gets them back. He lets them go. Can't be bothered to chivvy the editors, I fancy. He's no confidence in himself. What you said to him about his work simply stunned him. Let's hope it'll have some effect."

Mendoza was himself again.

"If you will come to dinner to-night with me," he said, "we'll set to work on him properly. There'll be two other people, an American called Thorn and his wife. She is a Spaniard and she does not know quite six words of English. He has just brought her back with him from Cordoba, where he has been painting for the last two years. I knew him in *Paris*. *She is the daughter of a retired bull-fighter.*

138 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

You will like her. Seven o'clock, please, and your simplest gown for Concepcion's sake. The house is 18, Church Lane."

"I'll come," said Ottilie.

"Good," said Mendoza, "then I can be off. You must not go yet. There's Allabone, the critic. I will fetch him over here for you to talk to. Make him take you upstairs to look at Punchester's pictures. They are rather worth seeing, and what Allabone says about them will be rather worth hearing."

Three minutes later he was in the street, with opportunity to consider what it behoved him to do.

CHAPTER X

I

ABOUT the same time Raymond Adkin was boiling his kettle for tea on the gas-ring in his attic bedroom.

Raymond was not an advanced cook. He could boil water and he could boil eggs and there he stopped. I daresay he could also have boiled milk, but he had never tried. When he drank milk (which was seldom) he liked it cold; and he drank it at the creamery halfway down his street.

With Adkin the business of nourishing his large body was simple. When he was in funds he ate cooked food at the Hen and Chickens' eighteen-penny table d'hôte. When he wasn't, he lived on brown bread, Cheddar cheese, marmalade, tea or cold water. And sometimes he bought an egg at the creamery and carried it carefully home and boiled it and ate it. He liked an occasional egg very much.

His room was a strange place.

Because it had had a very ugly wallpaper he had whitewashed its walls. On these walls there was not a single picture, but they carried a sort of irregular dado of rough sketches in charcoal—heads, nude figures, grotesque flowers, cloud-shapes, bits

of pure decorative design, anything, everything. Raymond found the white wallpaper very handy and economical. When he should have covered with his jottings so much of it as was at a convenient height, all he would have to do would be to mix another pail or two of whitewash and enter forthwith upon his possession of a new virgin territory. Because he had never been able to afford a carpet there was no carpet. His bed was a mattress in one corner with a bolster laid against the wall. A rug was all his bedding, though in the winter he might add his overcoat and, on very cold nights, some old newspapers. In the window stood the drawing-table, large, solid, square and made of fine mahogany. It was a relic of his days of splendour. Upon it stood his two big spiral wooden candle-sticks, his ink bottles, pens and other materials of his art, a cheap nickel clock, and the blonde goddess, Kuan Yin, ransomed this three days from the dungeons of Mr. Simonds by five of Punchester's sixty-six shillings. A single deal chair stood at the table. Most of the back wall of the room was occupied by a vast and splendid Dutch walnut wardrobe, elaborately inlaid. This was another echo of past glory. Not that it had originally cost Raymond any great sum. He had bought it, a wreck, for thirty shillings, and hoisted it home piecemeal. Its present fair appearance was due to the hours that he had spent upon it since setting it up, polishing it and restoring the vanished bits of its marquetry. Six good months the job had taken him, and in search of suitable *woods* (for he had sworn to use no stain) he had

tramped hundreds of miles through London's streets. He could have sold it any day for twenty pounds; but he would as soon have parted with his left hand. Besides, to get it out of the room it would have had to be dismembered.

In it reposed his few garments, his water-jug, his three towels, his drawings, his saucepan and his fiddle, his loaf and his cheese, his salt, his cup and his saucer, his plate, his knife, his spoon, his sponge, his soap and his razor. Behind it stood his round tin bath.

Out on the landing was the tap from which he drew water and the sink at which he washed.

I believe this is all.

No, I have forgotten the view. Of course I ought to have mentioned this much earlier, at the very beginning of my catalogue indeed—for it was on account of the view that Raymond had come to live here. The exceedingly low rent, to be sure, of this exceedingly high place had influenced him to some extent; but he could have had other and better rooms as cheap or cheaper at a much inferior altitude. The view, however, was not to be denied. Its claim upon him was absolute. He had to have that view.

Across the roofs of some small houses and an obscure hair-net factory he gazed (whenever it pleased him to look up from his work in the window) upon the huge panorama of South-west London, from the towers of Westminster, to the high ground of Clapham and Wandsworth. The shining Thames lay in the middle distance, with all its shift-

ing, suggestive life of barges and tugs. Beyond a heaped, smoky-blue wilderness of roofs and railways and spires and gasometers, the gentle Surrey hills were, in clear weather, outlined.

A lad with an imagination to feed was not likely to jib at a few steps if they could promise him such wonders.

Dawn, stealing through red gates, often found Raymond on the watch for her, his chin sunk in his two palms, his elbows planted on the table, stiff and cold with long waiting, long brooding upon the grey withdrawal of hushed mysteries.

Then came his reward, the debauch of brave colour above the sleeping city; the precise definition of detail by the smokeless air, every furthest line drawn sharp and clear as with an etcher's needle; the hills revealed without a smudge upon their undulations; the river flaming, its boats like blots of ink. London woke, drew her veils about her and began her day's business. Her trains ran hooting over their bridges and viaducts; the smoke of her fires climbed aloft, drifted, united, parted; her boats slipped their moorings, stole out into the current, hoisted brown sails. The hills vanished.

In the strong light of day the mystery was gone but the attraction remained. Now the sleeper was fully awake and up and about her affairs. The blood coursed fiercely through her veins; she sweated and drove. Five million human beings occupied on five million concerns, making money, spending it, selling goods, selling one another, selling themselves, *going* to the office, the green-grocer's, school, the

devil, playing pianos, working typewriters, rehearsing plays, screwing down coffins, arranging flowers in the drawing-room, promoting companies, arresting company promoters, writing novels, serving luncheons, serving bankruptcy-notices, hanging themselves, bearing children, cutting off legs, cutting off nephews, cutting off to Callao, trying on hats, sewing on buttons, hawking fish, taking people up in lifts, throwing people out of public houses. A suggestive line of thought, not easily to be exhausted. Raymond wasted plenty of time pursuing it.

He knew the vast city in all her aspects. When the sun went down and flooded her with rose and gold; when on the black cloth of night her lamps displayed their inconsequent embroidery; when snow, an hour or two, hid her with its pure mantel; when the red moon rose hot upon her through the thin fogs of summer; when April's showers and sunlight wove their mazy dance across her sky; when the copper thunderclouds climbed and billowed out of Southwark against the wind from Kensington.

Yes, it may be said that the stairs kept their promise faithfully enough. Raymond, at any rate, had no quarrel with them.

II

To-day, because he was going to dinner, Raymond, *when he had made his tea*, let his brown

loaf lie in the wardrobe. He did this less from a wish to economise than from a feeling that it would be wrong to spoil his appetite. Not very often was the youth privileged to loose himself upon well-cooked victuals and, when he was, he liked to be in good shape for the business. Just now he was hungry—he was always hungry, he thanked God—for though he had lunched heartily, on bread and cheese, at one o'clock, three and a half hours had gone by since then and that food was nothing but a memory. Yes, he was hungry. But how much hungrier he would be, by seven, if he left the bread alone! Tea, however, would do no harm. Great stuff tea. Not an ounce of loss of appetite in a gallon of it. Pure stimulus.

He poured out a cup and lit a cheap Virginian cigarette, sat down at his table and went on with the *Path to Rome* book-cover which he had forgotten that he had promised Otilie not to draw for her.

What are you to do with such people?

Let them perish, obviously.

He worked away happily all the rest of the afternoon, drinking tea and more tea, smoking cigarettes and more cigarettes. In his pocket was seven and threepence ha'penny, all that was left to him in cash out of Punchester's cheque.

But in the wardrobe were a mighty lump of cheese, two tins of water-biscuits, three brown loaves and four pots of marmalade.

And Kuan Yin was back in her place, blandly, *blondely* presiding over his labours and his destinies.

His design, since this cover was to be a gift, was fittingly elaborate. In motive it was not unlike one of the covers that we have seen in Punchester's room, the River of Fishes; but to that cover this one was as the first of Brahms's variations to the Handel theme that it decorates. The Path began in the left-hand top corner, crossed to the right, turned on itself, crossed again and so continued, turning and crossing, till it disappeared at the right-hand bottom corner, under the dome of St. Peter's Cathedral. And along all its sinuosities were disposed odd little toy villages and towns, mediæval fortresses, monasteries, camps of soldiers, churches, mountains, lakes, a forest (with a violent looking brigand standing beside it). And upon the Path travelled a strange assortment of people and vehicles—a monk; a motor-car; a steel-clad knight; an organ-grinder, pushing his instrument; a fine lady, riding with a hawk on her wrist; a peasant on his donkey, with corn sacks before him and behind him; a lord's coach drawn by six horses; a huntsman with his hounds; and I know not what else. About five times the figure of Mr. Belloc, recognisable by his pilgrim's staff, scrip and cocked hat, appeared, trudging manfully along.

All this was drawn very small, in compliment, I imagine, to the style of the lady whose property it was to become.

It was about half inked-in when Raymond put down his pen and turned Kuan Yin (as he did at the end of every day) so that she might enjoy the sight of *darkness* coming upon London and the

146 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

birth of London's lights. He got up, washed, ran a brush(I forgot this implement just now) over his hair, took his fiddle and went on his way to Mendoza's dinner. He guessed that it would be getting on for seven o'clock; nor was he far out. The first clock he saw told him that he would be only five minutes late.

III

He found the party assembled.

The Thorns he had been told to expect. For Ottilie he was unprepared. Yet he greeted her without a blush or a stammer. This was not because he was shameless, but because he had honestly forgotten his promise to her. And if he refrained, that evening, from telling her how he had been principally employed since their last meeting, it was not because he had a guilty secret to hide, but because he wanted his book-cover to surprise her.

She, poor innocent, made no doubt at all that the new Ben Jonson was, by this time, well and truly drawn, whereas there wasn't a stroke of it done. The presence of the Thorns, however, kept her from making any inquiries. When they should be gone it would be time enough for her and Mendoza to set about him, as Mendoza had promised her they should do. She contented herself with a "Hello, Jones" in reply to his "Hello, Smith," and took her place at table between Mendoza and the American.

Mrs. Thorn could talk no English. Mendoza accordingly devoted most of his attention to her.

Raymond was soon chattering away to her husband as if he had known him for ever. The courteous American tried from time to time to draw Otilie into their conversation, but she was well satisfied to be quiet, and repaid none of his efforts on her behalf with much more than a smile and a murmur.

She was intensely happy.

To think that it was only a week since she had posted *The Lady in Bed* to Punchester! Since then what enormous things had happened to her! She had made a friend of the first comic artist in the world, perhaps the greatest that had ever lived. She had adopted her dear Jones. She had lost all her money. She had been taken on to *The Useless*, and was a made woman. She had turned her back on the Head of the Frolings. She had acquired two original Mendozas and had been promised a third. And now she sat at table with the daughter of a bull-fighter. Decidedly things had been happening to her.

She let Raymond and Thorn talk, and covertly studied Maria de la Concepcion.

A most notable person this Mrs. Thorn. She was about twenty-four years old, Otilie judged—quite wrongly, for she was not nineteen yet. A fair Andalusian, this one, with hair like straw, huge blue eyes with long eyelashes, and thin, straight brows (both quite frankly blacked) a large laughing mouth with full, brightly-painted lips and two rows of small and perfect teeth. Her oval face was plastered with powder. Her hair was parted in the middle and drawn close to her head across her ears on each

side. A tall shell comb stood up above the knot that lay on her neck. Gold rings as big as pennies dangled from her ears. She had a large firm bust and a large firm waist and her feet and hands were none too small. Of the people was Maria de la Concepcion, and her manners proclaimed it. She was a jolly soul, a good chap. She laughed and joked with Mendoza in their own vivid tongue, with a complete absence of self-consciousness. Both elbows on the table, she talked with her mouth full, drank her wine like a man, smoked a cigarette between bites, and every now and then met Otilie's eye and gave her a friendly smile and a friendlier wink, as if to say: "This is the life, my dear—eh what?"

Otilie had never seen anybody in the least like Maria de la Concepcion. She longed to know Spanish so that she could understand those two and join in their gay chatter. Since she couldn't, she feasted her eyes upon this spectacle of abounding health and good spirits. The girl fascinated her.

Anfitrión, Mendoza's man, had cooked the meal and now served it. This was a solemn-looking person, grizzled, dark and a trifle bald. He was perfectly competent whether as cook or butler. What he had prepared was beyond praise and entirely Spanish—a hotch-potch of green vegetables and beans so thick that in its case the problem of whether one eats soup or drinks it could not arise; a dish of red mullets in the Barcelona style; a duck stewed with red peppers and olives; small fritters *steeped in honey*; and a triumphant tart of sliced *apricots* smothered with whipped cream. These

things he offered to his master's guests with a confiding friendliness, leaning forward a little to indicate some morsel peculiarly worthy of attention, or whispering across the mullets, "Please, you take the sauce, sir. *Muy Espanis*, this sauce. Not miss her? No? Esplendid!" Nor could he seem happy until his dishes were cleared. It was upon Raymond that he soon came to count for his gratification. "One esmall piece more, sir? Only one little esmall piece? Yes? Bravo!" and he would ladle the last spoonful on to Raymond's plate.

So it was with the wine. It never seemed to occur to Anfitrion that anybody could ever be affected by liquor. That which he pressed most entreatingly was a full-bodied drink from Murcia, two glasses of which would have put Otilie under the table. Mendoza had provided a light Sauterne for her and had strictly enjoined her to touch nothing else that Anfitrion might offer her. So here was a customer from whom the good fellow might hope nothing for his red immortaliser. Raymond, after one sip of the vigorous stuff, demanded to share Smith's bottle. "For," said he, "I have a head like a cork and this stuff will have me singing in five minutes and that means breaking up the party or throwing me out, and I came to this dinner, among other things, to eat." Here then was a second subject for Anfitrion's lamentations. However, he resigned himself to the inevitable and kept their two glasses brimming with the despised Sauterne. Did either of them sip, he was there to replenish. They both had to sip very sparingly. Thorn did his man-

ful duty by the red wine (mixed with water) and so did his Concha, while Mendoza absorbed it in quite reasonable quantities. From Anfitrion's point of view things might have been worse. And where the victuals were concerned he had absolutely nothing of which to complain. Raymond never let him down; not once. Not a dish went away out of which Anfitrion could hope to collect any nourishment whatever. He rejoiced openly in the circumstance.

No doubt he had some bread and garlic waiting for him in his kitchen.

Mendoza made no attempt to talk to Otilie. Raymond could do nothing for Concha's amusement, and Thorn, though he talked Spanish easily and well, must not be left to entertain his own wife. Besides, this was Concha's party.

She was very lonely, the poor girl, in this great London, where she knew nobody at all but her husband's friends. It was lucky, in Mendoza's opinion, that one of them should be a Spaniard, and it behoved that one to do his best to cheer up the exile's drooping spirits. Hence this dinner. He felt well repaid for his trouble as he looked on Concha and thought of her as last he had seen her, huddled up in the sofa of her hired sitting-room, with eyes of despair and drooping mouth, blubbing to her saints to remove her speedily from this land where the sun had no heat, even when it occasionally shone, where there were no women to gossip with *and no toros*. Ah *los toros*! How was a girl to live *without them*? How? How? How-ow-ow!

Mendoza couldn't give her her *toros*, but he could talk about them with her. Though he had not spent six weeks in Spain for over twenty years, and in all that time had assisted at but fifteen bull-fights, he had never failed to keep himself abreast of the only really important feature of Spanish life by diligently studying the columns of his regularly-delivered *Matutinal*. Once a lover of *los toros* always a lover of *los toros*.

And so, now, he talked, over this dinner, *toros* with Maria de la Concepcion and again *toros* and once more *toros* and nothing but *toros*. He knew her father's glorious record as well as herself. With her he could pour scorn upon the indifferent performers who had succeeded that great man as idols of a fickle and indiscriminating public. With her he could swop the names of espadas, breeders, agents; with her compare the merits of this classic ring with that; lament with her the dearth of such constructions in England; glow, with her, at the thought that her Diegito's stupid English business might possibly, possibly, be concluded in time for her to get away before the season, over yonder, should be quite ended.

Thorn laughed at them openly, but his eyes were soft as they dwelt on Mendoza. What a good fellow, he thought! All this trouble just to cheer up a homesick girl. And how he was cheering her! This was not the Concha de todos los Dolores, with whom he had been living for the last month. Here, back again, was the brave, jolly soul he had married. He swore *in his beard* that he would hurry things

through at the Gallery. Better for his show the last dead, doubtful week in July—and they had it free—the thing could be done—better that and Concha happy than to set the ball rolling for those damned dealers in October and coin money, but, for two solid months longer, deny her sun and her *toros* to the girl he loved. Rot money, anyway! There was something more in life than selling pictures.

Yes, Mendoza left Otilie to the other men, though God knows how gladly he would have been rid of Maria de la Concepcion and her *toros*, yes, and of her husband and Adkin to boot. Nor did he explain his conduct or apologise to Otilie for it, save to say once, while the hearty Spanish girl was helping herself generously to duck; “You wouldn’t think she’s ready to die of home-sickness, would you?” That said, he judged that Otilie would understand what he was doing and would give him her approval. He had formed a pretty high opinion of his Señorita’s penetration.

Otilie hadn’t been worrying about his neglect of her. Not a scrap. She was far too happy; far too much interested in Mrs. Thorn and Mrs. Thorn’s prodigious red, black and yellow Manilla shawl, and Mrs. Thorn’s adroit and beautiful manipulations of its flowery amplitudes. She felt that she could stare at Mrs. Thorn all night. But she mustn’t. Only now and then was a glance permissible. She took it as often as seemed reasonably decent. One after another she fixed details in her *memory*—the huge pierced comb; the pattern of

the shawl; the rather coarse hand, with its prodigiously reddened and polished nails; the turn of the wrist, as the thumb flicked away the ash from a cigarette; the fine swell of the throat; the sudden backward toss of the head, as the mouth opened to emit its harsh laughter; the scornful out-thrusting of the lower lip; the arm crooked to the hip under the folds of the shawl. All these things she noted and, with noting them, was far too busy to feel neglected. She would have liked to join in this animated discussion that was going on between the two Andalusians, but she couldn't. Other regret she had none.

The meal came to an end. Anfitrión served some perfect coffee. They pushed back their chairs and went into the studio.

This was a big bare room with little in it but a table, a great double chest of drawers, an easel or two, a stove, a grand piano, a sofa and some chairs. None of the usual artist's properties littered its corners. There were only three pictures, a Degas water-colour, a Vierge pen-and-ink drawing, and an oil by Zuloaga. In the chest of drawers were, on one side, Mendoza's collection of other men's etchings, on the other the numbered proofs of every state of his own. There were also sundry big portfolios crammed with his sketches and the finished drawings which, for some reason or other, he had neither sold nor destroyed. And there was a long, low bookcase, with a few good bits of porcelain and jade scattered over its top. And there was——

But the cataloguing of the contents of rooms

154 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

threatens to become a vice with me, a vice which I must check. I am supposed to be a story-teller, not an auctioneer's clerk. So let us take the rest of Mendoza's studio for granted, I pray you, and pursue the business which has brought us together.

IV

For half an hour they chatted of this and that and the next thing, looked through the etchings, rummaged in the portfolios, and digested their meal.

Somehow Thorn got sat down to the piano and began to play. They subsided into chairs to listen; urged him to continue, which he did. He was an accomplished performer and not in the least modern in his affections. They fared very nicely on Chopin, Beethoven and Bach. Now Raymond added himself and his fiddle. Raymond was not a virtuoso, but he played truly and with decision and with fire. Thorn accompanied him through a respectable Suite by Scarlatti. Then Raymond produced a book of Sarasate dances.

"I can't play these as they ought to be played, of course," he said, "but I thought they might be appropriate to the occasion, eh?"

"It was an inspiration," said Thorn. "Watch my wife," and he began to strum from the page at which the book opened.

Mrs. Thorn bounded out of her chair with a scream of delight and rushed to the piano.

Thorn stopped playing with a laugh and turned to

Mendoza. "Luiz," he said, "if you'll clear the decks, you'll see something."

Mendoza jumped up and took a guitar from the wall. Mrs. Thorn screamed again and began to snap her fingers and prowls like a panther upon the floor of the studio. Mendoza went up to her and spoke a few rapid sentences. She exclaimed, screamed, clasped her hands together, rolled up her eyes and nodded vigorously some twenty times. Mendoza went to the door. "Anfitrion," he shouted.

Anfitrion appeared. Mendoza addressed him in Spanish. With a loud shout Anfitrion disappeared. Mendoza began to tune his guitar at the piano, Thorn and Raymond to push all the furniture to the walls. Anfitrion arrived. He had changed his decent morning coat and waistcoat for a little tailless jacket and a red sash. On his head he wore a stiff round hat of black leather, ornamented with a fringe of bobs round the rim. In his hand he carried two pairs of castanets. Mrs. Thorn snatched a pair and fitted them between her rosy fingers. "*Vamos!*" she cried.

Thorn set to work. So did Raymond. Mendoza took a chair and his guitar began to buzz.

Mrs. Thorn threw the end of her great shawl across her shoulder. She caught up a deep red rose from a bowl that was on the bookcase and set its stem between her lips. She put her arms akimbo and began to strut across the floor, swaying from the hips and tapping the boards with her heels. Upon Anfitrion she bent a glance of intense scorn.

But was it Anfitrion? Could it possibly be

156 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

Mendoza's quiet respectable confidentially-smiling butler, who now stood facing the lady, with his head thrown back and his chest thrown out like a pouter pigeon, knees slightly bent, one stamped forwards, arms in the air, eye flashing fire to dominate a tiger. Unquestionably it was Anfitrion because it could be nobody else; but it was an Anfitrion transformed. It was Anfitrion with the music of Spain pulsing through his decent body. It was Anfitrion, the ex-professional dancer, now suddenly given a chance to show himself off.

Spanish dancing goes down to the very roots of life. It portrays the huge strength of that Force which can change the radical antagonism of the sexes into fierce mutual desire. It begins in careless contempt and passionate refusal. It ends in absolute worship and ecstatic surrender. It is pure animalism. In it the male principle asserts its will to dominate and enslave its opposite; the female, its hatred of and its revolt from that domination and enslavement. The end is foreseen subconsciously from the beginning, foreseen and longed for; but the consciousness denies it. The pride of the individual rejects the compulsion which it senses, the compulsion which the race, through the individual, struggles to accept. Hence the hostility for the man which burns in every line of the woman dancer as she takes the floor; hence the fascination and allurements which (it seems in spite of herself) she brings to bear upon him; hence the arrogance with which he meets her, the male pride with which he contemplates this weak thing that defies him;

hence his posturing, his airs and graces, his eagerness to exhibit his best points—the size of his chest, the turn of his leg, the elegance of his carriage; hence his open courting of her favour. But as the dance goes on individuality is gradually subdued as the race takes control, the race that wills its own continuation, regardless of the little prides and the little fears of the little creatures that make it up. Contempt now merges into curiosity; the pursuit begins. Hate and scorn and rejection give way to an amused tolerance. She flies, but beckons. Denied, yet promised, he follows ever more ardently. His first half-contemptuous interest warms to admiration, then to longing. He is entreating now. And she is in more than half a mind to yield. They stamp and advance, retreat and circle round one another. At last it is all enticement, all a frank avowal of desire and it ends, as all things end, according to the will of Life and not according to the wishes of those in whom Life is. A moment the captured hunter holds his eager captive. And the music stops.

This is what Mrs. Thorn and Anfritron acted upon the floor of Mendoza's studio, while Raymond fiddled like a man possessed, while Thorn and Mendoza smote their instruments and uttered fierce barks of encouragement to the protagonists, while the maddening castanets and the four hard heels of the dancers clicked out the measure with unflinching precision.

Ottillie, curled in a great armchair at the other end of the *studio*, was the sole spectator of these

activities. That she understood exactly what those two pagans were doing may be doubted. To a young English girl dancing is just dancing, a pleasant way of escape for the superfluous energy of youth. She is not accustomed to regard it as a profound symbol of things beyond the range of human understanding, too sacred and too mysterious to be expressed otherwise than by the Arts which words do not hamper. Nevertheless she was greatly moved by what she had seen and heard. She had not thought that mere dancing could excite as this had excited her. It had been all she could do to refrain from adding her cries of encouragement to those of Mendoza and Thorn. She had also acquired a wholly new respect for Mrs. Thorn. She no longer supposed her to be amusing or interesting. "Terrible" was more the word for that panther-like lady.

Mendoza got up, came over to Otilie and sat down beside her.

"Well, Señorita?" he asked. "And what do you say to that?"

"It frightens me," she said. "But I want more of it. Much more."

He laughed. "You shall have it," he told her. "Now that Concha's begun, she will not be satisfied to leave off quickly. And old Anfitrión has not been so happy for years. He used to do this for a living, you know. They will dance as long as we play. So it frightens you, does it?"

"I think so. I never saw anything in the least like it. I adore it, but I don't understand it. What *do you suppose* it means? For I'm sure it means

something. It's not just moving about to music."

"No," he said, "it isn't. But how do I know what it means? Concha and Anfitrion don't know themselves. They think they do, but they don't. It goes deeper than anything they can grasp."

"And what do *they* think it means?"

"Ah," he said gravely, "I shan't tell you that." She looked gravely back at him.

"I don't think I want you to," she said.

He gave her a queer little smile, then rose and went back to the piano.

He was himself intensely excited by the music and the dancing. It was long enough since he had felt their power and his Southern blood was aflame in its response to their call. As he had looked on this girl, so tiny in her great chair, so serious, so lovely, so innocent, so wise, he had felt a sudden fierce longing to pick her up and crush her in his arms and kiss her ten thousand times and whisper to her over and over again that he loved her. Such a proceeding was quite out of the question. He had better set Concha going again.

This he did, without any difficulty at all. Mrs. Thorn, a girl of the people and quite unspoilt, saw no reason whatever why she shouldn't dance with Mendoza's manservant. Anfitrion was a stylish performer and an ex-professional, and in Art all are equal. Anything, in any case, to dance again! It made her feel that there was after all a sort of a chance that she might get back to Spain before the bull-fights should come to an end.

She danced five duets with Anfitrion and six solos.

V

The party broke up about midnight—early for Chelsea, but the orchestra hadn't another note in it, and Concha, with sound instinct, declined to spoil her effect by lingering where she could no more be the centre of the proceedings. She shook hands graciously with Otilie (who had simply not been in it) clapped Raymond on the back, punched Mendoza in the ribs, gave Anfitrión her hand to kiss and (after yawning cavernously) dragged her Diegito away, vowing that these late hours were death to the poor little one.

"I'm off too," said Otilie when the Thorns had gone. "I'm exhausted, simply with watching it, and this poor Jones must be quite dead. We'll deal with him another day, Mendoza. I couldn't put my mind on it to-night."

"Deal with me?" said Raymond from the depths of the chair into which he had collapsed. "How deal with me? For God's sake don't let anybody try to deal with me now. I've been dealt with all I can stand. Good lord, Mendoza, what's that woman made of? Carriage springs?"

"Something like it," said Mendoza. "A whiskey and soda, Adkin?"

"Fifty, please," said Raymond. "No," he cried as Mendoza took up the decanter, "not on your life. I hate the stuff, really. Come on, Smith. I'll see you home." He pulled himself to his feet and went off to the piano and began casing his fiddle.

"I have a scheme," said Mendoza in a low voice

as he helped her into her cloak, "for the rescue of our ingenuous young friend."

She looked up at him happily. "You have?" she asked. "What is it?"

"Wait," he said, "till I have brought it off. It may come to nothing, but if I tell you it is quite certain to fail. Never talk of what you are going to do, Señorita. There is a whole army of long-eared, eavesdropping devils especially told off to listen to our boastings and do us in the eye. Did not you know?"

"All right," she said, "I expect it's safer. But *you'll* bring it off, whatever it is, and I think you're a perfect darling. I'm ever so grateful."

He winced. He didn't want her gratitude; nor was it good to hear her call him a perfect darling like that. He felt suddenly old and very harmless. What, then, was he to this child? A useful uncle? An amiable, middle-aged convenience whom she might safely—oh, quite safely—pet and stroke with her little soft hands, and employ comfortably—oh, quite comfortably—for her own cherished purposes without ever a thought of danger? He gritted his teeth together and clenched his hands tightly. It was not thus that women had hitherto estimated Mendoza.

For one breath he hated Otilie, for her youth and its unconscious scorn, hated her for the innocent confidence with which she accepted him as her collaborator, her easy assumption that he must be amply satisfied with his own reasonable share of her *grateful regard*.

162 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

The next moment that same youth and innocence clutched his heart, and a passionate thankfulness swept over him that he had the strength and the experience wherewith to serve and protect them.

"To-morrow," he said, because he had to say something, "I make my first move. If that goes well, it will be for Adkin to play. Tell him, if you please, as he takes you home, that there is something in the wind, and try to put some sense into his thick skull. It is no good making chances for him if he is not going to take them."

"Oh, he shall," she promised. "I'll talk to him like a stipendiary magistrate. You needn't be afraid. He's never had a real hustler behind him yet. Poor dear, I declare I'm quite sorry for him. It was a pretty dark day for Jones when we came into his young care-free life."

Here the victim returned with his fiddle-case.

"A great and glorious party," he said. "I didn't know I could play Sarasate a quarter as well. I think the devil must be in your Mrs. Thorn, Mendoza. She compels."

"It's inherited," said Mendoza, "from her father. A terrific personality, the old Relampago. That means Thunderbolt. In the season of 1902 he killed two hundred and thirty-two bulls in precisely two hundred and thirty-two strokes. It was said—but it was not the case—that his animals used to lie down and offer their necks to his sword, hypnotised by his eye. I saw that eye once at quite close quarters. It is like a searchlight. It gave me a *turn*, I promise you. We must have another evening

soon. It'll be a real charity to that poor little Concha."

"Poor little Concha be hanged!" said Raymond. "I've fiddled my arm half off. Now then, Smith. Outside."

Mendoza saw them to the head of his stairs. They waved to him from the landing and called out their last good nights; then vanished. He stood, peering below him and listening to their footsteps until the house door closed. Nor for some moments did he move. It was as if he hoped to catch one more glimpse of a small hand sliding down the stair-rail.

At last he straightened his body and stood upright. He raised his arms and stretched himself slowly. "*O santo Dios!*" he sighed, "to be twenty-three again."

On the journey of every man there comes an hour when Youth, that gay companion, says: "Here, friend, we part. There lies your road. Another must conduct you now," and suddenly is gone. Then the wayfarer discovers that the path up which he has been moving (and not quite so comfortably of late) has ceased to climb. He stands precisely on a summit. Behind him, bathed in sunlight, falls away the pleasant country where hitherto he has dwelt. There are the green slopes, the fat corn-lands, the noble cities, and the sea with all its ships. Before him the path descends—not abruptly, not wholly robbed of sunshine—but it descends, definitely, inexorably. And into what? A darkness. *The wind strikes chill, here, on the traveller's face*

164 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

and, as he pulls his cloak about him, he sees upon the road his new Companion beckoning him to advance.

That hour had come to Mendoza.

CHAPTER XI

I

THE moon was high when they came out into the street, high and full. Raymond said: "We ought to see the river, you know. There'll be some air moving there too."

She took his arm. "Jones," she said, "you're a sad idiot in many ways, but you have your inspirations. We must certainly see the river."

They turned in its direction and soon came out of the narrow street on to the Embankment. Not far away a very ugly suspension bridge spanned the stream. It looked miraculous, unreal, ready to dissolve and vanish. Crude warehouses on the farther shore seemed castles peopled by legendary folk. The four tall chimneys of the electric power station trembled with ecstasy, worshipping the white watcher of the sky. Battersea Reach was a road of silver. Here and there red eyes peered from the darkness at the water's edge.

"We shall sit down," said Raymond, "and look at this." Presently they occupied a bench, and now they fell quite silent. London rumbled round them. A bat, hunting moths through the plane trees, was for a time the only living thing in sight. Then came *a policeman to exchange a good night with Ray-*

166 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

mond, whom he seemed to know. Three boys, playing mouth-organs, went by across the road; their music died away. From a floating barge a man called and was answered faintly from the shore.

"Mendoza," said Raymond suddenly, "is the most glorious man I have ever come across."

Ottillie wasn't thinking about Mendoza. She was wondering what the other side of the moon was like. Since sitting down she had, you observe, travelled some distance from the Chelsea Embankment. Raymond brought her back. She remembered that she was to talk to him like a stipendiary magistrate. She didn't want to. She didn't want to talk to him like anything or at all. She wanted to stare at the moon, to sit still and silent and yield herself to sorcery.

"Oh, hush!" she said, and laid a hand entreatingly on his arm. It stayed there. He looked at it awhile and then put his own on it. She accepted this promise of refrain from unnecessary chatter.

Jones understood. A stupid, exasperating old thing, Jones, but in some ways most intelligent and comfortable. You had only to say "hush" and he hushed. He understood. That must be why he was so hopeless at business. The things he understood were no use in business. He simply failed to understand the things that were of use in business. He gave drawings to Punchester, for instance, because he was grateful to Punchester for letting him draw priceless book-covers at a guinea apiece. Well, that was going to be stopped. Mendoza was *going to*—what was Mendoza going to do? Talk

about Jones to some editor? Probably. But would Jones make the most of this chance? Would he buckle to and be practical and hard and—hard? No, she didn't want him to be that. She didn't want her Jones to become hard. Well—sensible. Yes, sensible was the word. Yes, he must be made to be sensible at the very least. And now she must talk to him like a stipendiary magistrate.

"Jones, dear," she said, and recovered her hand.

He started. "Eh?" he exclaimed. "Yes? What about it?"

"I want to talk to you seriously," she said. "May I?"

"May you?" he echoed. "You mustn't ask *me* what you may do."

"Mustn't I? Very well, then, I won't. Jones, you've got to be sensible."

"Certainly," he said. "Of course. How?"

"Oh, I don't know. Work harder, I suppose."

"Work harder? I'm always working. Working isn't all getting lines down on paper." He seemed wounded.

"I know," she said, "I know. But, after all, if you *don't* get things down on paper you haven't much to show, have you? I mean to sell, I suppose, though it sounds very sordid."

"Not it," he said stoutly. "Selling's all right. I like selling my things well enough. One has to live, dash it! You talk as if I'd never made a penny by my work. Look at the things I've done for Punchester. Punchester wouldn't tell you that *I never do any work*. He might say that I fiddle

too much, but he'd do me the justice to admit that I manage to produce a book-cover fairly often."

She shied away from the subject of Punchester. It was dangerous. Jones's gratitude and loyalty to his solitary patron would not tolerate a denunciation—not at present.

"Jones," she said, "it's all very well to go on designing book-covers for Mr. Punchester, but it doesn't *lead* anywhere. Your work isn't *seen*."

"Punchester shows it to people he thinks will be interested in it. He says he quite hopes to get me some commissions for book-covers."

"But he doesn't."

"No, not yet he hasn't. You see my stuff isn't everybody's fancy. You can't expect Punchester to *make* people give me commissions."

"I don't," she said a little acidly.

"Besides," Raymond continued, "one of these days he's going to put me on *The Useless*. He'd do it now, he says, only he doesn't want me to burst upon the world too soon. He says that in a year or two my work'll be much better, more formed, you know, and that then I'll make my effect much more surely and be able to hold it. At present he doubts my power to do that. It would be no good for me, would it? to stagger humanity and then find that I couldn't keep it up. No, much better wait until Punchester says the word. Then he'll bring me out properly in *The Useless*, and he's promised to arrange a show for me too. A show of book-covers, you know."

Again she could hear Punchester speaking.

"Well, look here," she said, "Mendoza thinks you ought to be publishing your things *now*."

"He does?"

"Certainly he does. I should say Mendoza's as good a judge as Punchester any day."

"*He* says that? *Mendoza* does?"

"I'm telling you he says it."

Raymond was evidently impressed. "Good lord!" he said. "I knew he thought my things were pretty good. But that's not to say that they're sellable. You see, they aren't everybody's fancy."

She suppressed an impulse to scream at him *not* to go on quoting Punchester to her.

"Well," she said patiently, "he says that they ought to sell well if they're put before the right people; and I think he wants to talk to the right people about them."

"*He* does? *Mendoza* does?"

"Yes. You see, he and I have been laying our heads together over you, Jones."

"*You* have? You and Mendoza, do you mean?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. And think," she added, "what a jolly surprise it'll be for Mr. Punchester if he suddenly finds that you're able to sell your drawings and keep on selling them. How splendid for him to find that he was mistaken!"

"I don't know about that," said Raymond. "I fancy I ought to tell him if I begin to try my stuff about. It would be a bit disloyal, wouldn't it? to keep it dark. After all, I owe practically everything to Punchester. But for him—— What's *Mendoza's idea*? Editors or a publisher?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "you madden me. Why?"

"Because if it was a book to illustrate it would be a different matter. I don't see that that would make any odds to Punchester. He's often talked of trying to get me a book to illustrate. It's the magazines he's afraid of for me. He says once you begin in the magazines, you've got to keep going; but with book illustration you can take your time. Yes, if I could work something of that kind I wouldn't mind keeping it up my sleeve. Yes, it would be rather splendid to be able to hand a book with my illustrations to Punchester as a surprise. How pleased he'd be! But I expect it's nothing of that kind. And yet, Mendoza's seen my drawings for *Shandy*. By Jove! Smith wouldn't it be great and good if he were to get me a commission to finish that job? It wants doing, you know. I say, what a marvellous fellow Mendoza is, and you're another! Why the devil should you two people worry about me?"

"I don't know," she said; "I suppose because you won't worry about yourself."

"Well," he cried, "show me a job of book illustration and I'm on for all I'm worth."

She saw that with that she had to be content. Well, pray heaven Mendoza was going to see a publisher to-morrow, not an editor!

II

She got up. "I'm going to bed," she said, and as they set off together she took his arm confidently

and: "How much have you got left out of that three guineas?" she asked.

He produced his money and counted it and told her, seven and threepence ha'penny. "And why?" he asked.

"Because," she said, "I want you to give it to me."

He put it into her outstretched hand. "Of course," he said. "Is that enough, or do you need any more? If so, I'll draw some more book-covers for Punchester at once. I wanted to finish something I'm working on for—someone else first; but, naturally, if you're short——"

She stamped her foot at him. "Oh, my goodness," she gasped, "you think I want it for myself?"

"Well, *don't* you?"

"You think I'd come to you for money when I know that you——"

"It's all right," he said reassuringly. "I've got heaps of food at home. Go on, Smith. Put it in your pocket like a good girl."

"I will," she said, "and when you want it you're to come and tell me. I mean, when you really want it. Not unless. I'm going to be your banker, you see. And you've got to bring me all you make. Do you hear? And I'm going to dole it out to you. Then you'll always have money instead of never having any."

"Will I?" he said. "That sounds ripping, Smith. I say, that's jolly decent of you, you know. I've often tried to keep a bit on hand against hard times. *I bought a cash-box once for the purpose,*

but I had to pawn it, and I lost the ticket, and I never could have been bothered to get it out anyhow. It was a curse, that cash-box. I never could find the key. And there was never anything in it besides. It was a regular fraud. But if you'll look after my tin for me, it'll be great. Then, as you say, I'll always have some when I need it. And I say, you'd better give me back a shilling now—for cigarettes, you know."

She gave him the coin grudgingly.

"Now," she said, "that's got to last you for at least two days. Do you hear? I expect you smoke far too much."

"Yes," he said, "whenever I can. But I can't now, can I? I say, this is a thundering good scheme of yours. I shall have to work like the devil now. I say, you're a tremendous little brick, Smith. Ho, ho! I feel a regular millionaire already, opening a bank account like this."

She laughed at his little joke happily. She felt happy. She looked up at this huge creature that slouched along by her side and caressed him with her eyes. A lamb. A perfect lamb. Simply not fit to be out in the world by himself. What a good thing he had got somebody at last to look after him. And what a joy it was to have somebody to look after again. She'd been too long alone. Selfish, she'd been getting. But now with this dear old dummy of a Jones——

She began to preach wisdom and to prophesy fame. If only he would be sensible, and do as she *and* Mendoza told him, they'd have him rich and

famous before he knew where he was. Mendoza thought such a lot of his work. He had only to make the most of his chances and not waste his time and money.

Raymond listened admiringly, nodding his head from time to time and agreeing with every word she said. Yes, he had been a stupid ass. Hadn't really tried a bit. What if a few magazines had turned him down and forgotten to let him have his things back? He ought to have stuck to it and gone on. Certainly. Yes. Rather. All the same he maintained that Punchester was probably right in wanting him to get a really complete set of book-covers done as soon as possible. "For my show, you know."

So discoursing, they arrived at Hobbema Studios, said good night and parted. He saw her swallowed up by the great ugly building; then, feeling a little forlorn, he wandered off towards his lodging down the moon-flooded road.

"That girl!" he said to himself. "What a little brick! And Mendoza! What a corker! Think of them bothering about me like that. Why in thunder should they? I dunno. Anyhow, I'm a lucky beast. First old Punchester and then these two. If friends are any good, *I* ought to get on all right."

At this moment a poor devil in tatters appeared at his elbow from somewhere and whined for a copper.

Raymond gave him his shilling.

CHAPTER XII

I

WHEN Mendoza got back into his studio he found Anfitrion retransformed into a man-servant, busily setting the place to rights.

There is said to be a Spanish proverb which runs: "The night is for sleep; the day for rest." Anfitrion was not an adherent of this philosophy, so long at any rate as his master's interests were in question. Every stroke of housework that was done in Mendoza's apartment Anfitrion did, and to anyone else a good fifty per cent. of such strokes would have seemed unnecessary. The place was always a triumph of cleanliness and order. Mendoza liked it so. He was himself a very clean and orderly person, and the traditional squalor of Bohemia made no appeal to his affections. He never tried to damp the ardour of Anfitrion. Nor would he have easily succeeded. One rule, however, he had established. It may be stated thus: What room the Master is in the Man shall let alone. Wherever Mendoza was not, Anfitrion was welcome to dust and sweep and wash and polish and tidy up to his heart's content. Wherever Mendoza was, Anfitrion's fidgety hands were required to be still.

Now, therefore, as his employer came through the door of the studio, Anfitrion automatically ceased from his activities. The hand which had been stretched to move one of the chairs back into its appointed place fell to his side and he straightened his body like a soldier coming to attention.

"Get to your bed, Anfitrion," said Mendoza. "You'll be the stiff one to-morrow. But you danced in a good cause. The Señora Thorn is very greatly in need of a little amusement these days."

"By God, señor," said Anfitrion with a grin, "I had not thought I had so much in me. But where there is music of the right kind and a fine woman to partner, age has nothing to say to a true dancer. And I do not think I disgraced myself."

"You danced like a demon. I was proud of you."

Anfitrion blushed almost black with pleasure. So overcome was he that he put out his hand again to the chair, but remembered in time and drew it hastily back.

Mendoza sat down on the sofa, put his legs up and began to roll a cigarette.

"Anfitrion," he said, "do you ever feel old?"

"I have felt old, señor; yes, often. It is not a good feeling. To-morrow I shall feel very old. But to-night I have felt young again. One must pay for pleasure. One should try to pay gladly."

"You have felt young to-night, Anfitrion. Well, I have felt old. As you say, it is not a good feeling."

"You, señor? Old? Never! Tell me that in *twenty years time*."

"I tell it you now."

"There is no fever? No ache anywhere?"

Mendoza smiled a little wryly. "No," he said, "it's something more fatal even than influenza, Anfitrion. But, after all, the disease, though incurable, is not at present absolutely threatening. It has not advanced very far in its ravages. I am still hale and active. My eye is clear. My hair is thick. The blood runs through my veins at a reasonable pace. Life is still very sweet to me, sweeter by God!" he cried, "to-day than it has been this five years."

"Ah!" said Anfitrion, "that's better. To the devil with your talk of feeling old, señor! May life be sweet to you a thousand years."

"Amen to that."

"The Señorita enjoyed her dinner," said Anfitrion meditatively. "I think she will not want an English cook. But some kind of a girl will be necessary. An old devil like me cannot do everything for a young lady. But with two more inhabitants this apartment will not be commodious any longer. Perhaps, señor, I had better make some inquiries among the agents to-morrow."

"What the deuce are you talking about?" cried Mendoza staring.

Anfitrion smiled. "I suspected it already," he said, "before dinner. The way you greeted her told me much, and my eyes have not been closed since then. But now I know. Men of your age do not talk of feeling old unless they are most seriously *in love*. It is the thought of marriage that in-

duces the sensation of having bidden farewell to Youth?"

"Well," said Mendoza a little defiantly, "and what if you are right?"

Anfitrion spread his hands and said: "I will do my best to serve the little lady. I pray that she may accept my service. I am an old dog to find a new master, and I think I should soon die if I were turned out of these doors."

"Whatever happens," said Mendoza, "that won't. You think, then, that I stand a chance, friend?" he inquired. "You think that? You do?"

"God knows," said Anfitrion piously, "but if He told me Himself that the young lady will decline, I shouldn't believe Him."

Mendoza jumped up and took his hat. "I must go and walk about under the moon," he said. "In here it is stifling. Go to bed, Anfitrion. Go to bed and sleep if you can. I can't."

He rushed out of the studio.

II

A few minutes later he emerged from his street on to the Embankment.

"Ah!" he said, addressing the moon and raising his hat, "there you are, then. God preserve you, señora. What should we poor fellows do without you? The Universal Confidant! Always patient alike of lovers that howl (with the dogs) their sorrows in your ear. And you never give our secrets away. Absolutely trustworthy. And you never re-

mark how nor how often we change the burden of our lay—or if you remark it, you never tell us. To-night Dolores, to-morrow night Mercedes, the next Serafita, a week ago Leonora. Not a smile have you for our folly. Always the same to rich and poor, young and old, to English, American, Spaniard, Russian, Turk or Malay. Dear Señora Luna, lend me your company now.”

The lady stared down on him with that cold indifference of hers to the antics of lovers from which somehow those bemused wretches always manage to derive so much comfort. But Cupid is a notorious joker and hypnotist.

Mendoza, having got off his little speech, looked about for a well placed and solitary seat. Beyond the roadway two black blobs, not very far apart from one another, were visible above the top of a bench. Mendoza smiled indulgently and prolonged his stroll by a hundred yards or so. Good luck to them, whoever they were! Not for him to intrude upon their young raptures.

He found a bench where, he trusted, he would not be in the way—where, also, they would not be in the way—and made it his own. The bench he had avoided was still to be seen, but it was now quite sufficiently remote. He dismissed it from his thoughts. He fastened his eyes upon the Señora Luna and abandoned himself to subjective misinterpretations of her attitude towards him.

“Yes, Lady,” he murmured, “I did well to come out to you. Anfitrión, my man, is a faithful fellow, but he is not the kind of person in whose

society it is easy to rhapsodize. Naturally I don't expect to be a hero to him, but hitherto he has had no reason to doubt my sanity. With you, dear Lady Luna, I can be as foolish as I please. You will understand. You will even welcome my extravagances.

"And so let me tell you, Lady, that I am in love. In love, Luna, do you hear me? I, Luiz Mendoza, Citizen of the World, professional cynic and pointer out of other men's absurdities, aged never-mind-what, but at any rate quite old enough to know better. Yes, in love, fathoms deep, leagues deep, with a child in her teens of whose existence I was a week ago unaware. Let me tell you about her, Luna *mia*. She is small—oh, but extremely small—small as a violet—as a young, young violet—and as dainty and as sweet. I love her because she is so tiny and so delicious. I love her because she is so much too perfect to be bruised and hurt by contact with a dirty world. Ay! and it would bruise her, that dirty world. But it shan't. I swear it! She is mine, the precious one. I love her, again, because her heart is so valiant. A very great spirit dwells within that tininess. She declares 'protectorates over large, stupid young artists and makes oath that their unquestionable genius shall be acknowledged. And this, mark you, the moment after she has been herself taken up by the beastly finger and thumb of Fate and dropped plumb into the very deepest part of the soup. She is wise too. She is not just an impulse and a gesture. She can take her measures *and act with resolution*. She issues her commands

(and oh! the voice of her) and lo! the middle-aged cynic is enlisted in the noble cause and happy to be there. He is her dog. She pats him, scratches his ear; he wags his tail, and gallops off to do her pleasure. But beware dear, small tyrant, beware. You think the middle-aged one a good, biddable creature. You never dream that perhaps he may not prove so middle-aged and biddable after all. Suppose he has other views for himself than you have for him? Eh? What then? Suppose you find that he has become young again? What then? Suppose——”

He broke off with a laugh. “*Caramba!*” he said. “What a silly calf am I! But what a night for mooing! Anyhow this has done me great good. I’m twenty years younger than I was twenty minutes ago.” He began to roll a cigarette, the first he had made since quitting Anfitrion. Symptomatic.

“To-morrow,” he thought, “I see Froling and talk up the young Adkin. In the afternoon I produce for Froling’s inspection the young Adkin and his illustrations to that crazy clergyman’s crazy book that these crazy English think so splendid. Froling is delighted. The young Adkin is commissioned to draw pictures for the superlatively tedious romance that this poor lord has perpetrated. He draws them. Froling is enraptured. The organisation of a show, to herald the appearance of the book, is suggested to him. He organises the show; talks Adkin up all over London. The show is held; proves an eye-opener, Punchester wakes up to find Adkin famous. Punchester puts Adkin on *The Useless*.

My little lady bestows on me—what? A smile? Good dog, Mendoza? Come and be patted. Well, I think not. By that time—by that time—by that time—Yes, things have got to be otherwise between us, then, than they are now. That's for me to manage. To-day she suspects nothing; by then she will know. What will she do? God! what will she do?"

He rose. "Well," he muttered with a bitter little laugh, "even if I don't get me a wife, I shall have forced a devil of a great genius on the world's attention."

III

He turned to go home. Glancing carelessly along the line of benches, he perceived that the sentimental couple he had befriended were also on their feet. One, he saw, the man—was very tall; the other—the girl—was very little. A shock ran through him. His mouth opened and the cigarette that was in it fell to the ground. Deep in his throat an oath snarled. At that distance and now that they were afoot and side by side, they were unmistakable.

Even as he looked she slid her hand under her companion's elbow, and the two moved off along the Embankment.

Mendoza dropped back on his bench, put his elbows on his knees and laid his head in his two hands. "Is that then, after all, the way of it?" he whispered—not to the moon.

CHAPTER XIII

I

WHEN Mendoza was announced, Lord Froling was busy licking his lips over an auctioneer's catalogue. His attention was riveted upon lots 34 to 52—the Property of a Gentleman Going Abroad. Forty-eight snuff-bottles in jade, crystal, amber, glass and porcelain—evidently a collection, small, no doubt, but by no means without interest. In fact, choice. The Gentleman Going Abroad had known a snuff bottle when he saw it, whoever he was.

Lord Froling had only lately taken up snuff-bottles, but his store of these objects was already becoming famous. He rather fancied that some of lots 34 to 52 would be added to it on Friday afternoon. But not without a struggle. Breitfeldt would assuredly be on hand. Well, if Breitfeldt wanted Lot 44, Breitfeldt would have to put his hand pretty far down into his pocket. And the old rascal would mean having Lot 44. He had been in the rooms yesterday afternoon, they had said, picking the things over, and he was not the man to miss a lot like No. 44. Three delicious pieces. Delicious!

One was in dark green jade, mottled with gold.

Up either side of it tortoises clambered diligently in and out of tall fungus. The stopper was milk-white coral. The spoon was of pink coral.

Another, spaciously hollowed out, was in hairy crystal, very nearly black so prodigious was the number of its threads, with, on one side, a stratum of grey and above that, in one place, another of white. The grey was carved to represent a plant of bamboo, at the foot of which stood a stork spiking a frog. Stork and frog were done in the white stratum. The stopper was rose crystal. The spoon was of ivory.

The third was cut out of a charming piece of turquoise. Its design was extremely simple and beautiful and it was carved delicately and in very low relief. On one side a Kylin adored its child, on the other three round-nosed Corean lions frolicked with a ball. The stopper was of curiously-carved glass, dark blue overlaid with white, and represented a warty toad. The spoon was of black horn.

What, Lord Froling wondered, would Breitfeldt go to for all that? A hundred? A hundred and twenty? You never knew with Breitfeldt. Where snuff-bottles were concerned the old fellow was insane. Insane! Damn him! Well——

Here Mendoza entered. Lord Froling put down his catalogue and stretched out the hand of welcome.

"Here you are then," he said, "punctual as ever to your appointment. A whiskey and soda? You *look a bit pale*. The heat, eh?"

184 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"No," said Mendoza, "I can stand all the heat England is likely to give me. I did not sleep too well. But nothing to drink, thank you."

"A cigar, then? No? Of course, you don't smoke them. Mendoza's cigarette. Proverbial, eh? That's right. That's right. And now to what am I indebted for the pleasure of this visit? I may tell you, Mr. Mendoza, that since you telephoned this morning, I have been indulging in hopes—hopes, however, that I fear are not to be realised. Put me out of my suspense. You have not come to tell me that you've thought better of it?"

"No," said Mendoza. "I am still clearly of opinion that your novel should be illustrated by no one but an Englishman. In my work the Spaniard always shows himself. That is as it should be. A man's ink or his paint should be mixed with his blood. But this puts me out of the question as illustrator of a work so essentially English as *The South Sea Bubble*. If we could call Hogarth back from Olympus——"

He preferred to leave the rest of his sentence to Lord Froling's imagination. It seemed unnecessary to insist on how he thought Hogarth would receive an offer of the job of making pictures for *The South Sea Bubble*.

"Well," said Lord Froling complacently, "since we can't do that, and since you don't feel yourself the right man, we must look elsewhere. But where? I confess that I'm stumped. None of the men who are drawing to-day seem to me to be just what is *wanted*. Plenty of facile fellows about, but not

with the real distinction. My novel, Mr. Mendoza, if it is to be illustrated——”

“I have a man for you,” said Mendoza.

Lord Froling leaned forward in his chair; behind his pince-nez his tired eyes lit up. “You have, eh?” he asked. “Who is he?”

“Raymond Adkin.”

“Never heard of him.”

“I daresay not,” said Mendoza. “I never heard of him myself till last week. A protégé of Punchester’s.”

“Ah!” said Lord Froling. “That sound promising. Our good Punchester has an astonishing *flair*. I wonder he has never mentioned this Atkins to me.”

“Adkin. He’s only a boy. He’s been doing a lot of book-covers for Punchester lately.”

“Book-covers, eh?” Lord Froling looked at Mendoza over the top of his pince-nez. “Ah!” he said. “Punchester’s been keeping him up his sleeve until—— Precisely. But I want more than a fine book-cover for *The Bubble*.”

“You shall have more. Adkin is a genius. I dislike the word, but we have to use it now and then. This is a case. He has a set of drawings for *Tristram Shandy* that you will like to see, I think. After that, I shall be surprised if you look any further for your man.”

“Young, you say?” Lord Froling inquired after a little meditation.

“Quite young.”

“Poor, I presume?”

“Very.”

"Amenable, one would say, to reason in the matter of price, eh? One has to think of such things. In these hard times, eh?"

Mendoza's face never moved, though Lord Froling had offered him a thousand guineas for forty illustrations, a cover and an end paper.

"He is young," he said, "and eager. He wants his chance, not money. You can come to terms with him in three seconds."

Lord Froling beamed upon his visitor.

"When can I see this Atkins and his *Tristram Shandys*?" he asked. "This afternoon?"

"Adkin," said Mendoza. "I have got to get hold of him. I have said nothing to him about this. I avoid raising in young hearts hopes that may not be fulfilled."

"Quite right. Quite right, of course." Lord Froling would have preferred to hear that the young man was even then biting his nails in the hall; but since it wasn't so he was prepared to smile upon Mendoza's consideration for the fellow.

"I shall be in all this afternoon," he went on, "and to-morrow until 12.30, when I have to go to a sale. If you can lay hands on this young gentleman quickly, send him along. Send him along, Mr. Mendoza, send him along."

"I'll bring him," said Mendoza.

"By all means. Do." Lord Froling didn't want Mendoza. He preferred to negotiate with young artists unembarrassed by the presence of third persons. But, since it had to be, he was quite ready to welcome it. "That will be most kind of

you, I'm sure," he said. "This Atkins ought to be very grateful to you, Mr. Mendoza."

"Adkin," said Mendoza, "is young enough to be grateful, but I don't care whether he is or isn't. My concern is to make him known. He is too good a man to spend all his life doing book-covers for Punchester."

"Ah!" said Lord Froling, "quite so. I was forgetting that. I fear that this will not please our *Useless* friend too tremendously. I mean, when and if these illustrations appear, Punchester may find it a little difficult to keep his young man we know where. Yes? Ha, ha! I think Punchester might have told me about this Atkins. Every time I've met him since you declined my offer, I've entreated him to find me an illustrator. Yes, I don't think I shall say anything to Punchester about this. No. He may find it out for himself, confound him!"

"As you please," said Mendoza gravely. He got up. He did not love Lord Froling's society. "I'll go and dig Adkin out," he said. "We'll be with you some time this afternoon, I hope."

"So do I. So do I. A whiskey and soda? No? A cigar? Ah, no! You don't smoke 'em. The proverbial—Well, if you must be off——"

II

Mendoza came out into Onslow Gardens.

"So!" he muttered, "that's done. If it's a grave I'm digging, the first sod's dug. It's the first sod that counts, I *suppose*, and the rest, I hope, will

be easier. I don't want many more nights like last night." He turned towards the river.

"'This Atkins ought to be very grateful to you, Mr. Mendoza,'" he said with a bitter little laugh.

"Well, yes. Perhaps he ought. But what do I want with his damned gratitude?" he asked savagely. "What do I care whether his damned genius gets itself known or not? Why am I doing this folly? Setting to work to make a man, so that he can marry the girl I love, the girl he loves or is going to love, the girl who loves him or is going to love him, the girl who looks on me as a kind, helpful old gentleman. And because I promised. Well, there it is. I promised. And her—it was her, I promised, and that's the answer."

"And yet," he thought, as his feet began to travel more slowly; "the mischief's not actually done. I've only to tell that old fool that, on second thoughts, I believe Adkin's too inexperienced for this commission and advance some other candidate. That mightn't be easy. Froling knows what's what where drawings are concerned. But I can easily put him off Adkin, at any rate. And when all's said and done, how do I know that Adkin'll satisfy Froling? I've only seen that one set of his drawings and most of them are only sketches. Is it fair to Froling to——"

Here he halted suddenly. "*Basta!*" he said aloud. "*Basta!* Enough. This is dirt you're thinking, Luiz. Forward!"

A few minutes later he was beating on Raymond's door.

III

He found the young man drawing busily. *The Path to Rome* was defining itself quite to its constructor's liking. Raymond was very happy. This was a bit of work which was not going to be exchanged for cheese and loaves of bread and tobacco. This was not going into the possession of Punchester, a person for whom Raymond had never learned, in his heart, really to care. There was something, not to be specified, about Punchester which jarred. He was not always quite civil, for instance. He could say quite beastly things, things that stung. And even when he was in an amiable temper, even when he encouraged and praised and patted one on the shoulder, there was a sort of—greasiness, was it? Well, over-doneness, perhaps. A bit too affable altogether. His laugh, again. A bit on the cackling side, Punchester's laugh was. Not absolutely right somehow. Just a shade not right. When a fellow laughed he ought to do it as if he enjoyed it. Now Punchester did it as if he was apologising for it. And that damned false eye, of his!

Well, well, never mind Punchester. Punchester was all right. A devilish useful institution, anyhow. This *Path to Rome* cover was coming pretty tidily. One of the best yet, it was. Punchester would like to have it, you bet. Well, he damned well wasn't going to.

This was for that blessed little Smith, this was; and Punchester might whistle for it.

190 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

Smith! What a girl! What an artist! What a man of business! And what a duck! Lord! what a duck! The eyes of her, and the hair of her, and the mouth of her! And no bigger than six pen'orth of coppers. Lift her with one hand, a man could. And the goodness of her! Worrying her darling little head how to get a man into the magazines. Stirring Mendoza up about it. Mendoza! The courage of it! No lack of pluck there, however. And how rich that had been last night, taking all a man's money away like that! And so, here he was with nothing to smoke because every penny he possessed was at Hobbema Studios. Well, he'd be good. He'd stick it till after lunch and then he'd go and draw another bob. Would she mind his turning up again so soon? Well, it was her own fault. She oughtn't to have cabbaged all his coin. A great arrangement though. He could always now, have a reason for going to Hobbema Studios. But not unless he had money there. Well, he must see that he always had money there. Thank God for Punchester and the book-covers. The moment this *Path to Rome* was done, he'd set about the new Ben Jonson and a couple more. There was some sense in making money now. What?

"Come in," he roared and Mendoza entered.

Raymond looked over his shoulder, saw who it was and scrambled up from his chair. "Hullo, Mendoza," he said. "I'm afraid you've had the devil of a climb. Sit down. I'm afraid I've nothing to offer you but a drink from the tap. I'm out of

cigarettes even. Smith took all my money from me last night, and until I see her again I'm stony. That blessed little creature's appointed herself my banker."

Mendoza's face twitched as he sat down and laid his pouch and papers on the table. "Roll yourself one," he said.

"Adorable man," cried Raymond. "The only trouble is, I can't. I'm no use at conjuring tricks —" He put his prodigious *Path to Rome* design out of harm's way. "*You* make me one," he said. "Then I'll *know* you're an angel."

Mendoza took a paper and a pinch of tobacco, twisted them in his fingers and said: "Put out your tongue." Raymond obeyed. The conjurer ran the gummy edge along the point of the tongue, pressed it down, and with a flourish, presented the finished article together with his own half-consumed cigarette. Raymond filled his lungs with smoke, blew it out and sighed with satisfaction.

"Beware of that Smith, Mendoza," he said. "She's a force. She puts it across people."

"Yes," she Mendoza. He smiled a little wanly. The boy, he perceived, was not yet consciously in love; but how long would it be before he was? How long *could* it be?

"Every cent," said Raymond. "But I'll have another shilling out of her this afternoon. So help me bob, I will. Yes, and another to-morrow, if I want it. I know my rights and I'll have them. I won't be trampled on by her or any woman. But lord, Mendoza," he demanded, "how's one to resist a *little creature like that?*"

"Look here, Adkin," said Mendoza abruptly. "I've got the chance of a job for you."

Raymond's mouth opened. "You've got a job for me?" he said. "Already? Good lord, what a fellow! Smith told me you'd said you wanted to give me a leg up—and God knows how kind I think you are even to want to do it. But that was yesterday—Sunday. And now, you arrive with a job for me in your pocket. I told her you were the most glorious of created beings. You're a wizard too, it appears. What are your commands?"

"No, Adkin," said Mendoza, "I have not the job for you in my pocket. I was particularly careful to use the word 'chance.' But if you care to try for it——"

"If I care! My dear sir, do you think I don't want to make money? Haven't I promised Smith to work and be sensible. What'd she say to me, do you suppose, if I said 'no' to this truly superb proposal of yours. Try! I should say so. What is it?"

"It is to illustrate the dullest novel that has yet been written. Forty drawings, cover and end-paper. I was offered a thousand guineas to do it. I would not do it for fifty thousand. I managed to read five chapters. I would not finish it for a hundred thousand. I tell you all this so that you may pause before rushing to meet your fate. At the same time I advise you to do so. There is reasonable money in it, though not anything like a thousand guineas, I'm afraid, and your work will be *produced* regardless of expense. It, at least,

will be seen. It will even save the novel from oblivion."

"Who has written this dreadful thing?" Raymond asked.

"Lord Froling, a wealthy, highly placed and eminently respectable man. It is, I gather, actually his very first crime. He thinks—though he does not say so—that it is the greatest historical story in the English language. He is profoundly mistaken, Adkin. Yet he is quite resolved to publish it and to have it finely illustrated. And he will not be put off with anything but fine illustrations. He is, as you must know, a collector of extreme discrimination, and he perfectly well understands the difference between good and bad drawing. You will have to gird up your young loins, my Adkin, if you take this on. I think you should. It is a considerable chance for you, and you are young and strong, and the period is one that you have studied. The name of this book is *The South Sea Bubble*."

"Eighteenth Century London?" cried Raymond, his eyes bulging.

Mendoza nodded.

"I'm on," said Raymond simply. "Do I write to this jolly old nobleman for an appointment, or what?"

"You will come to his home with me this afternoon, bringing those *Shandy* drawings of yours. I think they will get you the commission. But I promise nothing."

"Mendoza," said Raymond, "you're a dashed good sort. Did you know it? I could lick your

boots for this." His voice broke suddenly and he was smitten with a short fit of hard coughing.

When he had done—"I shan't say a word about this to Punchester," he announced. "If it was magazine work I should feel I ought." He entered upon his explanations. "Smith agrees," he concluded. "I say, isn't Smith something miraculous, Mendoza?"

Mendoza got up, appointed an hour and went away.

IV

Raymond resumed *The Path to Rome*, and finished it by half-past two.

A little before three he called for Mendoza. They started for Onslow Gardens at once.

"Touching your price," said Mendoza, "you forgot this morning to tell me what you'll want."

"I'll want all I can get, of course," Raymond replied in what he supposed to be a very business-like voice. "Punchester gives me a guinea a time for my book-covers. I don't think I ought to take less for these illustrations. It isn't as if Froling had been in any way specially decent to me, like Punchester. But what do you think?"

"I should ask five each," said Mendoza, "and ten for the cover and seven for the end paper."

"Good God!" said Raymond. "Are you serious?"

"Perfectly. Why not? It is a fair price."

"But—but that would be over 200 guineas!"

"Well, what of it?"

"Froling'll show me the door."

"I do not think so. Not when he's seen what you have got in that brown-paper parcel of yours."

"You mean to tell me that I am to ask all that?"

"Yes, and stick to it. And for the copyright only, remember. If he wants the originals it's five guineas a piece extra."

"I suppose," said Raymond, "you haven't gone crazy, have you? Didn't you hear me say that Punchester gives me a guinea a time. And he keeps my originals too."

"That is between you and Punchester. You are not dealing with Punchester now. You will accept five guineas for the copyright of each drawing, and five for each original or I'll disown you."

"But *not* ten for the cover and seven for the end paper?" Raymond's voice was almost pleading. His feet tarried on the pavement.

"Yes, I say."

"They're not worth it, Mendoza. Punchester says——"

"I do not care a hang what Punchester says. That is what *I* say."

"Well," said Raymond reluctantly, "I promised Smith to be sensible and I suppose that means I'm to do as you tell me."

"Yes," snapped Mendoza. "Come on."

Raymond accompanied him in a daze. Two hundred guineas! A fantastic sum! Froling would never agree to it. Never. Obviously. But if he did? What a staggerer it would be for Smith! How pleased she would be! He began to construct *the scene in which* he should communicate the

amazing intelligence. He would be calling round at Hobbema Studios this afternoon for his shilling. She would begin by scolding him for his extravagance and refusing to part with a penny. Then he would say: "All right then I shan't let you have any of my two hundred guineas." And possibly—possibly—it might be four hundred that he would be able to say. Whatever it was, he would say it quite carelessly, just as if it were seven and sixpence that he was mentioning. How her eyes would open! Would she clap her hands? Would she dance round the room? Would she scream? Would she pretend to faint? What was he going to buy for her out of this money? And for Mendoza? He must think these presents out carefully. Mendoza liked jades. Good! The very thing. And he knew where the very thing was too. But Smith? A fur coat? Fine! She'd look heavenly in a mole-skin. And a muff of the same. And a toque. Or would she rather have a string of amber or—no, *and* some old ivory beads. Perhaps necklaces were hardly her style though. Furs were probably more the sort of thing. He supposed it would run to furs—a coat, at any rate.

Mendoza said: "Here we are."

V

They entered the house and were shown up at once to Lord Froling's room.

Lord Froling had bought far too many pictures in *his time* to exhibit any eagerness. He shook hands

affably with Raymond, offered him a cigar and a chair, and then drew his and Mendoza's attention to a couple of small red-chalk drawings—*fêtes champêtres*—which stood, framed in black, on chairs near the window.

"Conders," he said, "as you see. Two pounds seven shillings they cost me. What do you say to that?" He looked to Mendoza for his reply.

"I should say," said Raymond easily, "that you got them pretty cheap."

Lord Froling never insisted, with artists, on his social position unless he saw that they were themselves affected by it, in which case it became an asset to be exploited to the full. This shaggy young man of Mendoza's was evidently a person with whom it would not answer to play the lord.

He laughed pleasantly. "You're right," he said. "One doesn't come across bargains of the kind very often nowadays. Everybody knows such a lot about everything. But once in a while, even now, Fortune smiles upon the collector. These two little Conders now. Quite a small romance. I'll tell it to you, shall I?"

"I was down at Brighton a week or two ago, in lodgings on the Marine Parade—I hate hotels. My man Jarvis took a chill, poor fellow, and was laid up in bed. He fancied himself a great deal worse than he was, as these people always do, and he sent me a note asking me to come up to his room, as he had a communication to make to me. I won't trouble you with what he had to say, as it *would be hardly fair* to a thoroughly repentant

198 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

sinner whom I have forgiven for depredations, which, I trust, he will not renew, now that the fear of death is removed from him. An invaluable person, Jarvis, with whom I should be very sorry to part. A man who knows one's ways is worth a box or two of cigars over and above his wages. But to my story.

"On the wall of my penitent's attic room I perceived, the moment I entered the door, these two sanguines framed atrociously in the cheapest gilt. I could hardly believe my eyes, but there the things were and there they persisted in remaining. One close look at them was enough for me. I was glad I had persisted in climbing up all those stairs. To find a couple of Conder sanguines at the end of such a journey! Amazing! Amazing! I heard what Jarvis had to say, told him not to distress himself and returned to my sitting-room.

"The problem now was how to obtain possession of these drawings without exciting the horrible cupidity of my landlord. This, I knew, would not be easy. Once let people of that kind suppose that you are interested in any of their older possessions and you are lost. They imagine instantly that they are the owners of something worth 10,000 pounds. They decline to deal, hurry off to the nearest antique-shop and get done unfailingly in the eye by the Jew.

"After consideration I perceived that Jarvis must be my intermediary. The subjects of these drawings—I say nothing of their quality—are, as you see, not unlikely to attract the favourable *notice* of a middle-aged valet. Young ladies,

voluptuously formed, lying about in *negligées*; gentlemen in cloaks, whispering passionate words of love. Next morning I gave Jarvis (who was much better) his instructions. The short and the long of it is that he took a kind of a fancy to those two rather saucy red pictures in his room—in such terms, I understand, did he open the subject with Mr. Bartholomew—and that our good host parted with them most gladly and gratefully for five shillings each. Jarvis, who knows very well which side his bread is buttered, was quite satisfied with a couple of guineas over and above what he had laid out for me, and, to conclude, here they are, just home from the framers.”

Lord Froling chuckled with simple pride in his own astuteness.

“Behold the reward of virtue,” he said with a wave of his hand, “I shudder to think that I might not have gone up to see my poor Jarvis. Indeed I went by no means willingly. But I did go. I did, thanks be to Heaven! Now, however do you suppose two Conder sanguines came to be hanging on the wall of a servant’s bedroom in a Brighton lodging-house?”

“I do not know,” said Mendoza. “Shall we look at Adkin’s drawings, perhaps?”

All this time Raymond’s face had been growing darker and darker, while his under-jaw had protruded further and further. These signs had not escaped the notice of Mendoza who now, as he spoke, thrust out his foot and with it exerted some rather considerable *pressure* upon the toe of Raymond’s

200 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

boot. Raymond, looking up, found the eye of his friend steadily regarding him. The flame which was smouldering in his own died away; he shrugged his shoulders and began to undo his package.

"You wanted to see my work," he said to Lord Froling. "Here it is." He laid the open parcel on the table and removed *The Path to Rome* which was wrapped separately from the *Shandys*. This was not for the eyes of Lord Froling. He took it back with him to his chair, laid it on his knee, relit his cigar, plunged his hands in his trousers pockets, and leaned back in his chair to glower disapprovingly upon the peer.

"Ah!" said Lord Froling. "Quite so. Certainly." He sat to the table and began to examine the drawings.

"The damned old scoundrel!" Raymond was saying inwardly. "And boasting about it! That's your collector all over. A dirty breed. For tuppence I'd tell him to illustrate his rotten story for himself, and clear out; only that would be playing it low on Mendoza. And what would Smith say? Didn't I swear to be sensible? Very well then. I can't help it if this Froling's a swab. If one declined to work for anyone who wasn't exactly of one's own sort, I suppose one'd never get anywhere at all. It's Froling's money I want; not his friendship. Mendoza's right. I expect *he's* sold drawings to some pretty rascals in his time. It's nothing to do with us who buys our work. Producing it is as *much* as we can manage, without concerning our-

selves about the morality of collectors. So let it go. If he wants me, he can have me, but he shall pay for it."

For ten or fifteen minutes Lord Froling remained bent, in silence over the *Shandys*. Mendoza smoked. Raymond pursued his reflections. At length Lord Froling sat up and spoke.

"Very nice indeed," he said. "Very interesting, if I may say so, Mr. Atkins. You should, in time, do quite nicely as an illustrator. I like your 'Dr. Slop reading the Excommunication.' I like it. I like it. And your 'Abbess of Andouilletts and the Novice Margharita inciting their Mules to Advance.' I like it, Mr. Atkins, but——" he paused.

Mendoza said: "You will never get a better illustrator if you hunt for a thousand years. These drawings are superb, Lord Froling. It is not every day that the chance of introducing a man like Adkin to the world comes along. Seize it and cover yourself with glory."

Lord Froling didn't require to be told by Mendoza or anyone else that the drawings were superb. He had made up his mind about their quality before he had looked through half a dozen. His "but——" had been intended merely as the prelude to the application of a few judicious antidotes. The young man's price had yet to be settled. A little cold water was indicated.

He never got his hose going.

Raymond, who hated and despised him for what he had done at Brighton, said hardily: "I understand you want forty drawings, a cover and end

202 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

paper. My price for the copyright of the illustrations is two hundred guineas, and if you retain the originals, four hundred guineas. That's five guineas each, each way. The cover will be ten guineas extra, and the end papers seven, and the originals the same." He found that he spoke these enormities without any trouble at all. He didn't want to work for this old swindler a bit. Smith or no Smith, Mendoza or no Mendoza, he almost hoped that Froling would decline to deal.

Lord Froling didn't decline to deal, but he looked for help to Mendoza. He got none.

"That," said Mendoza, "seems fair enough!"

Lord Froling hesitated, biting down into his imperial with his long rabbit's teeth. He was resolved to commission this young man of Mendoza's, and though he knew he would get no one half as good for two hundred guineas, he very much wanted to give him only one hundred pounds. But in the face of Mendoza's commendation, haggling seemed somehow out of the question. He sighed heavily and swallowed his pill.

"Well," he said, "so be it. Two hundred guineas, to be paid on completion of the work."

"No," said Raymond, "I must live meanwhile. If I start in on this, I shall do nothing else till it's finished. I must be paid something on account." It was really rather jolly, standing up to people—people at any rate, that one disliked.

"Yes," said Mendoza. "He must be paid something on account."

Lord Froling wished Mendoza in Jericho. But

Mendoza wasn't in Jericho. Lord Froling swallowed his second pill.

"Well," he said again, "that's fair perhaps. We will discuss it in a moment. As to buying the originals, I have, until the book is published, an option to buy them at their copyright price."

"That's all right," said Raymond.

"And the payment on account?"

Raymond calculated within himself thus: "Forty-two drawings'll take me about twenty weeks. Say ten bob a week for food and tobacco—ten quid. Add about ten quid for Mendoza's jade—twenty quid. Smith's furs'll have to wait till I can get hold of a good lump. Say twenty-five pounds."

He said it.

Lord Froling took out his cheque-book.

"Your full name, Mr. Atkins?" he inquired.

"Raymond Adkin."

"A-d," said Mendoza. "K-i-n."

Lord Froling handed the cheque across the table.

Raymond pocketed it and rose.

"One moment," said Lord Froling. "It is understood that you keep this matter strictly to yourself. I don't want it to be known until the drawings are done. You will not, for instance tell Mr. Punchester about it; for I understand that you work for him."

"Certainly," said Raymond. "I won't say a word about it to him. But I shall have to tell one person. Smith, Mendoza, eh? I must tell her." He *looked obstinate*.

204 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"Yes," said Mendoza, to Lord Froling. He added: "It will go no further than that."

Lord Froling perceived that Smith, whoever she was, must be allowed to know.

"Very good," he said, "but no one else."

"And now," said Raymond, "where's that book? The sooner I get to work the better I shall be pleased."

Lord Froling opened a drawer and produced a ponderous type-script bound in limp scarlet leather. "Here," he said, "it is." He laid it carefully on the table in front of Raymond.

Raymond took it up as if it had been a pound of sausages, lumped it on top of his drawings, and remade his parcel. "Good!" he said. He got up. "That takes me off," he said. "I've got to get a shilling out of my banker—for cigarettes, you know—before I begin this business. Good-bye, Lord Froling. Good-bye, Mendoza."

He strode to the door, opened it and vanished.

VI

In the room there was a short silence while Lord Froling looked mild surprise over his pince-nez at Mendoza, who had begun to roll a cigarette. The house reverberated to the slam of the front door. Then: "Did he say a shilling?" Lord Froling inquired. "And from his banker? His *banker*?"

Mendoza sprang to his feet. "Yes," he said harshly. "Good-bye."

He strode to the door, opened it and vanished.

VII

Lord Froling stared stupidly at his own reflection in the pier-glass over the mantelpiece and shook his head. "Odd folk," he murmured. "Extremely odd folk, artists. But that boy's a wonder. A wonder."

CHAPTER XIV

I

OTILIE was sketching, in pencil, an attractive young lady in an elaborately embroidered kimono, seated on a fat sofa and surrounded by thirteen highly decorative black-and-white spanielettes with snub noses, curly tails and frog-like eyes. This picture was to be entitled, *The Nursery*.

Punchester had twelve of her drawings. The first was to appear in the September *Useless* and the rest thereafter month by month. So far as *The Useless* was concerned she had nothing to think about for a year. During this period she was to receive thirty-six guineas less the ten pounds which Punchester had paid her on account, that was to say £27 16s. or £2 6s. 4d. per month.

She had, in ready money, the two pounds and threepence which remained to her out of her fortune, and the ten pounds which Punchester had paid her.

For the next twelve months she could count definitely on an income of thirty-nine pounds sixteen shillings and threepence.

Out of this she would—unless she sold other drawings or pawned her possessions—have to feed

herself, clothe herself, buy her drawing materials and pay the rent of her studio.

This rent amounted to thirty-two pounds annually.

Obviously it behoved her to get something ready against the day when the magazines (on her appearance in *The Useless* should begin to clamour for specimens of her work.

In anticipation of that clamour The Nursery was being prepared.

It was now the 11th of July. The September *Useless* would appear on the first of the month. She had a little over seven weeks. She trusted to produce in that time not less than three drawings—perhaps four. These she trusted to sell for not less than five guineas apiece. Fifteen guineas. Perhaps twenty. Perhaps more. She had nothing to worry about.

As for her money which Mr. Ardle had made away with, she had dismissed from her mind all hope of ever seeing it again or any of it. She had received a printed communication from the gentleman who was liquidating the affairs of the bank. It had been purely formal and not in the least optimistic. The newspapers had been optimistic, then pessimistic, then pessim-optimistic. She had gathered that nothing much was to be expected. Perhaps three shillings in the pound. Perhaps four. Perhaps two. Probably not that. She gave up reading the newspapers. They made her unhappy. Not for herself. She didn't worry a scrap about herself—was she not on *The Useless*? It was for her fellow victims that she grieved. Some of their

cases were so dreadfully hard. Old people, blind people, people incurably ill, reduced suddenly from decent comfort to nothing a year and with no possible hope of earning a penny. Widows with large, young families; retired shopkeepers; lodging-house people. To read about them made her feel as if it was wicked for her to be young and strong and talented and as good as recognised. Could she cry out about her loss when so many poor folks were so much worse off than she? No; let the money go. If anything should be saved, well and good. If not, well and good again. At any rate she wasn't going to sit down and lament, when she might be so much more profitably and more amusingly employed drawing a pattern of black-and-white spaniels.

Her twelve pounds and threepence would, at a pinch, feed her for three months and more. And in six weeks she would be published in *The Useless* and would be selling her stuff.

In eleven weeks, it was true, she must produce eight pounds for her September rent. But *The Useless* would be out on September first.

First September to twenty-fifth September—three weeks and a half.

Three weeks and a half in which to sell three drawings and earn fifteen guineas with which to carry on.

And she had her ivory umbrella—worth five pounds, and her ivory bag—worth four pounds ten, and her ivory hat-pin—worth fifteen shillings. *Thank goodness* she had gone a burst on real ivory

when she had been rigging herself out for London! It had seemed a horrible extravagance at the time; but now one saw the wisdom of it. Ten pounds or thereabouts! Why, she would be as right as rain.

II

Someone beat upon her door. She opened it to Adkin. He carried two flat brown-paper parcels.

He said: "I'm a made man. And I want tea."

She said: "You shall have it. What's happened?"

"Mendoza has happened," he said as he entered. "Nothing else is of the slightest importance. But before I tell you, open this. It's your *Path to Rome*."

He held out the thinner of his two parcels. She cried: "Oh, Jones! What am I to do with you? You promised to be sensible. I am very, very cross."

"I don't care," he said defiantly. "I had to do it. It came and it had to be done. And Punchester shan't have it. It's yours."

She opened it and gazed awhile upon the admirable design.

"You like it?"

"I adore it," she said gloating.

"Very well, then. That's all right."

"It isn't all right, Jones. It's all wrong. You've broken your promise." But she was looking at the picture, not at him; and her voice was wholly indulgent.

210 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"You didn't expect me to keep it, did you?" he cried. "You couldn't have. I tell you I had to do it. And I had to do it for you."

"But, Jones—" She tore her eyes away from the seductions of *The Path to Rome*. She laid it face downwards on the table. She prepared to talk to him like a stipendiary magistrate. "Look here," she began again.

"Oh," he cried, "don't start in on me now. This is my great day. I've got a commission. Two hundred guineas. P'raps four hundred."

"Jones!" she squeaked and forgot all about his misdemeanour.

He unwrapped his second parcel and gave her the type-script. "Read that," he said, pointing to the title. He cast himself into a chair.

She read aloud. "*The South Sea Bubble*—a Historical Tale by Athelney Laverick."

"By which?" he inquired.

"By Athelney Laverick. Who is Athelney Laverick?"

"Never heard of the fellow. Let's have a look. Yes, that's right. That's the name that's here. But what the—how the— Ah! I have it. It's the old boy's *nom de plume*."

"What old boy?"

"Why, old— Steady on! If he's using a *nom de plume*, that means he wants to conceal his jolly old identity, doesn't it? He said nothing about that; but p'raps he forgot. Anyhow, I'd better keep my thumb on his real name, I expect. *Hadn't I?*"

"I don't care who he is. I want to hear about the commission."

He told her, scrupulously preserving the incognito of his patron, referring to him always as "this Athelney person," or "old Athelney." Even when he at last produced and displayed his twenty-five pound cheque he remembered to "keep his thumb" on the signature. Of Mendoza he spoke with a sort of adoration. "What a fellow! What a marvellous pal! If it hadn't been for him I'd have asked a guinea a drawing. But no, 'Five guineas,' says he, 'for each copyright and five for each original, and ten for the cover *and* seven for the end-paper.' And it came off, Smith. It came off. Old Athelney made no bones about it at all. Not a bone. But the twenty-five on account was my own idea entirely," he added. "*I* thought of that. And it came off too. Not a bone. Astonishing how quickly one becomes grasping with a little encouragement. But, of course, I rather detest old Athelney, and that helped. He's a nauseous person altogether. I shouldn't have been sorry if he'd turned me down. Not the kind of man I shall enjoy working for. He told us a story, Smith, about himself that made my skin crawl at him. Listen."

He told her about the Conder sanguines.

"It isn't so much his doing it," he explained, "that's so horrid as his boasting about it. He evidently admires himself for having cheated his landlord. What do you suppose his soul's made of? *Rotten eggs?* If that's what collecting brings

one to, Heaven preserve me from ever becoming a collector! Well, he didn't put it across *me*—that's to say Mendoza and me. We were one too many for him, I rather think. A beastly old man, Smith. Obviously as rich as Crœsus or thereabouts. A houseful of priceless things that must have cost him thousands and thousands. He's famous for his collections. And then to play a dirty trick like that and to be proud of it! A lord, too! Oh, I hated him, Smith, with his old red eyes and his little goat's beard and his wobbling pince-nez and his bony, crooked fingers, and his bald head under his half dozen long hairs. I hated him. But all the same, I'm going to be sensible and do his book for him. If one began refusing to work for people unless one fancied them personally, one'd never get anywhere; would one, Smith?"

Ottillie knew now who Raymond's patron was.

Though her single encounter with Lord Froling had been a particularly brief one, it had lasted quite long enough for her artist's eye to register his salient physical peculiarities. An old nobleman who was famous for his collections and answered to the description which Raymond had given could hardly be anyone but her detested uncle. "Athelney Laverick" and the head of her mother's family were unquestionably one.

She did not, however, tell Raymond that he had unwittingly betrayed his author. It would have been heartless to rob him of his touching belief in his own sagaciousness and discretion; and towards *this simple Jones* she could not act heartlessly.

That he disliked Lord Froling, again was just as it should be; but she saw no use in adding to that dislike by informing him that his patron was the "dirty dog" whose proceedings had roused him to such wrath in the Café Royal.

No, Jones was quite sufficiently not in love with Lord Froling. This commission was going to be of enormous importance to the career of Jones. It was very necessary that he should put his whole soul into its execution. Since anyone will work better for a man whom he admires than for one whom he despises, the dislike which Jones had taken to his patron was already a misfortune. Why add to it? Why, indeed, do anything but try to make him forget it, if that were to be done?

"It doesn't matter a button to you," she said, "what kind of a person this Athelney Laverick is. And I expect he wasn't half as cunning at Brighton as he made out. In fact I shouldn't wonder if the whole story was an invention. He probably gave quite a fair price for those Condors. But my father used to say that collectors always try to make you think that they are frightfully clever. It's part of the game. If they can show you a thing that's worth £100 and get you to believe that they only gave sixpence for it, you're bound to suppose that their knowledge of antiques must be terrific. It's just conceit and the desire to stagger the ignorant. Or it may be that they just want to excite your envy. And so they always have their story about everything they own. My father used to say that when a collector told him he'd got a thing for five

per cent. of its value, he always assumed that the collector had really been done and knew it, and was just trying to even things up a bit for himself."

"Never mind about old Athelney," said Raymond. "It may be as you say, but I don't care a hang. He can be as big a blackguard as he pleases. What *I've* got to do is to make a set of illustrations for his blooming book, and I'm going to do it. I can too. I know that period backwards. It's marvellous for decorative drawings—wigs, ruffles, hoops, swords, coaches, Queen Anne architecture, black slaves, highwaymen, and a shipping that's never been beaten for beauty. Oh! what a fellow that Mendoza is. Think of him getting me a job like this. And by the way, Smith, I've got this twenty-five pounds. To-morrow I'm going to cash it. I suppose you think I mean to hand it all over to you?"

"Every penny," she said.

"Wrong. Now listen." He produced an envelop all scribbled over with figures and consulted it. "I don't want more than ten bob a week for myself, ever," he proceeded. "I can do these drawings two a week. Forty-two drawings; say twenty-one weeks; at ten bob a week, that's ten pounds ten. Ten guineas from twenty-five quid—oh! I've got it all worked out here—leaves fourteen pounds ten shillings. The jade I'm going to get for Mendoza costs fifteen guineas, but I'll bet I can get it for ten. (Shut up, Smith, and permit *me* to speak.) But say I have to give thirteen guineas for it. Thirteen guineas from fourteen pound ten is seventeen

shillings. That's nearly two weeks' expenses for me extra. If I can't get that jade for less than the fifteen guineas they ask, that means I shall have to make it up out of my ten guineas expenses money. Fourteen pound ten from fifteen guineas is one pound five. That's what I shall have to find; but if I spread it over twenty-one weeks that means only about one shilling and twopence farthing a week. That is to say, eight and ninepence three farthings instead of ten bob a week, and I can worry along on that like a lord, though I may have to go a bit slow in tobacco. But this jade, Smith, I must and will have for Mendoza. It's a heavenly jade. A pure white magnolia carved miraculous with leaves in dark green. I never saw the like of it anywhere else, and it's got to be bought at once. God knows if it's still in the shop. It was there three days ago, but with a thing like that—and what the devil are you screwing up your face at me for?"

Ottillie was screwing up her face because she was struggling not to cry. Most improper, of course; most irrational, most unaccountable; but the impulse to weep was somehow in her. She was desperately afraid of giving way to it. Crying was not her style. She loathed crying. It always made her feel an idiot. It hurt too. Tears did not come easily to her as they do to most women. It also made one look hideous. She must not, not, *not*, cry.

Yet there was something about this proposal of Raymond's which was extraordinarily moving; not only the gratitude, the generosity, the utter unworldliness which it showed, but still more its com-

plete unconsciousness of doing anything in the least out of the way. It was evidently the only thing for him to do. It had never occurred to him, for instance, that he might put off making this gift until he should have his lump of money when his work was done. No, it must be done now. The jade magnolia might not be procurable twenty-one weeks hence, and it was the jade magnolia that Mendoza must have. And if he couldn't manage to get a guinea knocked off the price, if he had to go short of food and tobacco for the next twenty-one weeks—what of it, so long as Mendoza had the magnolia?

And his blessed old calculations—all worked out to a farthing.

It was his calculations, I think, which caught Ottilie most closely round the heart. He was so serious and definite and practical; and wise; and so utterly foolish.

In the face of these calculations, in which he took such manifest pride, what could she do but approve of his madness? How was she to examine, in the light of ordinary prudence, this programme which he had so enthusiastically outlined; how pour the cold water of her commonsense upon the flame of his desire to give pleasure to his friend; how even beg him to wait until he should be paid the balance of his money? Not to be done. Had she not cried, she might have attempted something against him; but her tears betrayed her into his hands.

She managed to turn a sob into a laugh and, jumping up, she ran into her kitchenette and set *the gas-ring* going.

"You shall have tea in a moment," she called as she dabbed her eyes dry and put on the kettle.

"No," he said, "not for me. I must get home and begin this book. Mendoza says it's the dullest yet written on the planet Earth, so I'm in for a rotten time, and the sooner I'm done with it the better. What I want is to start the illustrations, and until I've ploughed through what I'm to illustrate I'm stuck. So good-bye, Smith, old thing. Look for me to-morrow morning about eleven. If you can spare half an hour we'll go up to Church Street together for that magnolia. I'd like your opinion of it before I buy it. Good-bye." He was gone.

Ottolie came back to the table and picked up *The Path to Rome*. Then she sat down and began lovingly to study it.

III

After tea she went to thank Mendoza. He opened the door to her, Anfitrion being absent.

"I had to come," she said. "Am I in the way?"

At the sight of the little black figure on his threshold the Spaniard's heart had paused in its beat. His thoughts seemed suddenly to have taken objective shape. For the past three hours he had been working as busily as possible on the drawing of Punchester Eating Sandwiches, which he had promised to make for his Señorita's delight, and never once during all that time had he ceased to think of her. Every line that he had put down had *been drawn for her and for her alone; every*

grotesque incident of the scene had been suggested to him by his ache to hear once more her small chuckling laugh; until it was as if she stood by his side to watch the drawing grow beneath his hand, even as she had stood, the other day, in her studio, to watch him draw those little black and white birds. He could almost feel the light pressure of her shoulder against his own, the pressure that told of her complete absorption, her complete forgetfulness. The uncertain coming and going of her breath at his ear told him again with what excitement she followed the progress of the design. He was aware of her fragrance about him.

And now, even as he signed his drawing, his bell rang. He opened his door and there she stood, asking if she was in the way.

In the way!

The question seemed so fantastic that actually he could not at once understand it. He could only echo it. "In the way?" he asked, quite stupidly.

"If you're busy," she said, "I'll go. But I had to come and thank you for getting Raymond that commission."

"Raymond!" he thought. "She thinks of him as Raymond. She thinks of him as Raymond. She thinks of him as Raymond. Not as Jones any longer. As Raymond. Not as Jones."

"That's all, really," she went on. "Just to say 'thank you.' But I knew you'd manage it. Oh! and one other thing——"

"Come in," he said abruptly and threw the door wide. "I have something for you." He had sud-

denly resolved to stamp this studio with a memory of her in which no other soul than himself should share, which no other figure should profane.

"You're certain——"

"Oh! come in and do not talk nonsense," he cried. She entered obediently and went into the studio. He followed her and pointed to an old high-backed chair covered with stamped Spanish leather which stood by the fireplace. "There," he said, "sit there. No, right back and let your feet dangle. Here's a footstool. Here's a cushion. Now, you are enthroned. How very astonishingly small you look. Do I make tea for you?"

No, she had had tea. She had only come round to thank him——

"Enough!" he said. "No thanks from you, if you please. The thing is done. It remains for your Raymond to do his part. Then you don't object to my choice of his patron?"

"Object?" she asked. "Why should I object?"

"Well, I did not know. You dislike this old gentleman. It was just possible that you might dislike having your Raymond beholden to him. But I had to risk it. To have told you what I meditated would have been ruin. You remember about those devils? And I could think of nothing that would prove of more value to Adkin. Your uncle is a Power. He can do worlds for your Raymond."

"Pardon, me," she said softly, "*our* Raymond. You mustn't forget that you've adopted him as well. But, of course, I don't mind. Am I the sort of

220 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

person to let my own private quarrel stand in the way of a friend's welfare? I hoped you thought better of me, Mendoza," she concluded with a pout and a reproachful glance from her great eyes.

He sat down with his big table between them and said: "The risk was really all mine. For what should I have done if I had annoyed my Señorita? Cut my throat, I think."

She began to tell him how she had discovered the identity of the patron, how discreet Raymond had been over the alias, how completely he had succeeded in giving the secret away. Every word she said stabbed Mendoza. The tender humour with which she treated the incident was warm with unsuspected love. He laughed in all the proper places.

"I know," she said, "that you won't tell Raymond that Lord Froling is my uncle or why I hate him. We agreed that all that was to be between you and me only. But I'm so glad I asked you to keep it to yourself, because you might have let it out, and it's really important that Raymond shouldn't dislike Lord Froling more than he does already. This commission has got to put him on his feet. He's got to throw himself into it with all his enthusiasm. If he does that he'll produce something marvellous. We want to do everything we can to make him like the man he's working for, or, tolerate him, at least. That Brighton story will take a good deal of living down on the part of my uncle, but I've already insinuated into Raymond's mind the belief that it was just one of those fibs that collectors tell in order to appear clever. And once Raymond has got ab-

sorbed in this work, the interest of it will carry him on and make him forget his disapproval of my uncle's morals. We must always speak very nicely to Raymond about my uncle, I think."

"I shall be careful to do so," said Mendoza steadily. "In a good cause I can lie like a Jesuit. Your Raymond shall hear nothing from me to your uncle's disadvantage."

She did not correct him again. The truth is that she had not wholly liked the sound of her own "our."

The name of Raymond on her lips had become a torture to Mendoza. "Here," he said with a certain roughness, "is that drawing I promised you." He held out the Sandwich-eating Punchester.

She took it with a little happy sound and began to purr and croon over it. He waited for her laughter. It came. His ears 'devoured it, while his eyes stamped his memory with the sweet image of her on her throne. He had no desire to draw her, and no need.

"This," she said presently, still bent over the drawing, "is my lucky day. Raymond has just given me the most gorgeous cover for *The Path to Rome*. It's a miracle. And now I get this. And Raymond's got this commission. And altogether I don't know what I've done to be made so happy. Raymond will expire when I show him this Punchester. Oh! dear, but I mustn't. Not yet. It would never do at all. Until Raymond has done these illustrations his illusions about Punchester must be respected, I'm afraid. It will upset him dreadfully to find out how that fat thief has been

222 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

treating him all this time. And he mustn't and shan't be upset just now. His whole future may depend on these drawings. He must be kept happy. But one of these days this and Raymond's *Path to Rome* shall hang together over my mantelpiece. I swear it. Oh! the great ogre's mouth of your Punchester, Mendoza! How am I to thank you for this drawing?"

"You're not to," said Mendoza, and went on staring at her fixedly. "Keep still," he cried anxiously. "One moment more." She had put the drawing down and had laid her hands on the arms of her chair.

She looked up startled and met his hungry eyes.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "what is it? What's the matter?"

In that last second he had achieved his purpose. The vision was secure.

"Nothing is the matter," he said easily. "I was only committing you to memory. But I have got you now. You are ~~here~~ here." He tapped his forehead and laughed. "You will not be able to escape, but I shall take very good care of you."

She too laughed, and in her laugh there was a hint of relief. For the moment she had thought that he was ill.

"I'm glad," she said. "You'll find me a tractable prisoner. I won't want to escape. Dear Mendoza, your memory's a place where I'll always be happy to live, I think. And now I must go. There's work to do and a living to make. I've been idle long enough."

"That bank," he said. "It's a bad business, I'm afraid."

"Absolutely rotten. If we get twopence in the pound we shall be lucky. But who cares? A competence never did an artist any good yet. I shall climb miles higher because of this. And meanwhile I'm quite rich enough for my needs for months to come. Oh! I'm not worrying about that old bank. Don't you worry about it, please."

"You swear you are all right."

"I swear that I'm all right."

"Then," he said, "I will not worry."

She caught up her picture and gave him her hand. He took it without a word and followed her out of the studio. At the door of the flat she left him with a wave and a smile and a good-bye. He made no answer and stood watching her in silence as she went down the stairs. Another wave, another smile, and she was gone.

IV

Mendoza turned and walked slowly back into the studio. He sat down in the chair which he had lately occupied and for a long time remained staring at the big empty chair by the fireplace.

"No," he said at last, "I'm not wanted here—not for the present. She's got enough, she says, for a time; and the boy's in clover with his cheque. Why should I stay and tear myself to pieces, watching? It's time, Luiz, for the middle-aged gentleman to obscure himself. He's not wanted here. Not for

224 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

the present. *Ay de mi!*" he exclaimed, "perhaps Sevilla would do me good. *Los toros*. They might help a man to forget an hour."

A little later Anfitrion returned.

"Ah!" he observed as he entered his master's bed-room. "It is a journey. Do I accompany?"

"No," said Mendoza from the depths of the trunk he was packing. "You stay here. I go South for a week or two. You can finish this business for me, however."

Anfitrion said nothing, but he slightly pursed his mouth as Mendoza brushed past him on his way to the studio.

"Is this prudence?" he murmured. "Or pain? Pain, I think. Ah, that little lady! Is she then quite mad?"

He went on with the packing.

bu
SI
at
po
fec
the
sha

CHAPTER XV

I

NCTUALITY was not Raymond's strong point, on the stroke of eleven he was at Otilie's door. He was bursting to be off, but first they had to divide the plunder.

Raymond had drawn his money in three five-pound notes, because, as he said, they made one so opulent, and ten pounds worth of silver, on principle, already mentioned, that in no other did a sum of money seem so large.

Four pounds five shillings were first carefully laid out on the table and to them one note was added. This made up the nine pounds five shillings and left the full fifteen guineas asked by the rightful owner of the jade magnolia.

They made absolutely certain that they had this fifteen guineas and then they made absolutely certain that they had the nine pounds five. While Raymond prowled and fidgeted to be gone, this treasure was wrapped up in paper by Otilie, put into her workbasket. The workbasket was into her trunk. The trunk was locked. Finally the key was placed in Otilie's handbag—not the one with the ivory frame, a much less important

receptacle in black cloth with a ribbon. Then Raymond put the other two notes back into their envelope, and this into another envelope which he found in his pocket, and this into a third which he took out of Otilie's wastepaperbasket. All went into the inside pocket of his waistcoat. He buttoned his waistcoat and his coat over it. Then he poured his silver back into his bag and put the bag in his trousers' pocket, where his hand continued to hold it firmly.

They left the studio. As Otilie pulled the door to, she thought; "Shall I want an umbrella?" The Yale lock clicked. "No matter," she thought. Nevertheless she pushed the door. "If it's locked," she thought idly, "I will. If it isn't, I won't." It was. She didn't.

They descended the stairs. As they came out into the King's Road a black cloud swung across the sun. "Bother!" said Otilie. "I must have an umbrella after all."

"I'll get it," said Raymond. She gave him her key and told him where her second-best umbrella was to be found. He ran up the three flights of stairs, burst into the studio, caught up the umbrella from its corner and rushed back to Otilie, leaving the door of the studio wide open.

II

A few minutes later Pietro Visconti, a young Italian model, ascending the stairs on his way to employment on the fourth floor, paused on the third

landing. He listened intently for a moment or two, glanced over the banisters, up and down; glanced along the passage, left and right; at last decided himself and knocked gently on the door which stood open so invitingly. None answering his knock, he put his head into the studio and peered cautiously round him. Then he stepped in and quickly and silently shut the door. Five minutes later it opened a crack. An eye appeared. A head came out. A slim body followed. The door closed. Mr. Visconti descended the staircase.

Above, on the fourth floor, John Redmayne looked at his watch for the sixth time, swore vigorously for the fifth time, and took a great oath that he would never give that young devil Pietro another hour, once the head of the page in his "Decameron," should have been finished.

III

The story now pursues Miss Wigmore and her protégé.

They walked, to save bus and train fares, and as they walked they talked about *The South Sea Bubble* ten chapters of which Raymond had read. His report was evil. It seemed incredible, he told her, that anyone should have made such a lifeless thing out of such palpitating material.

"How he's done it," he said, "I simply can't imagine. Historical stories are apt to be Wardour Street, but this one is more like Petticoat Lane. *There appears to be a plot of sorts*—the usual young

poet who comes to London with a collection of verses in his pocket and a tragedy in his head, and the usual young woman of noble birth, with a father who's obviously going to run a mucker in the stock-market, and the usual villainous lord who says 'Sink me!' and 'Zounds!' and the usual Betty Chamber-maid who says 'Lud!' and 'Lawks!' I suppose the poet wins fame and fortune, saves the situation for the father, and marries the girl and scores off the demon lord; and I suppose I shall have to get it all into my head somehow. But if I'm to illustrate this *opus*, I can't stick to the story; it's too ordinary and the people are all such stage dummies. I shall just let myself loose on the period and make street crowds and coaches and old inns, and masquerades, and handsome togs, and men sitting over their wine and cards, and women swopping scandal over their tea. There's enough in the book to hang any amount of such things on. And I can keep the hero with one set of features and the heroine with another, and the villain with a third, whenever they seem to come in plausibly. I'll do enough to make the book illustrated; but what I'm really after is building a panorama. If I do that I shall do something worth while. I'd rather chuck it all than merely illustrate."

Ottillie made no effort to change his mind. She knew that he must execute this commission in his own way or make of it a failure. A pity the book should be so uninspiring—but what else could one expect from a Froling? Yet it didn't matter. Raymond would make a panorama and the book would

have to take its chance of being illustrated. If he produced anything like his *Shandys*, nobody would care a snap about the book. Raymond's quality would shine out perhaps all the more splendidly for its dull setting. The only danger was that the gifted author might jib. She didn't think he would. He was wise about pictures, everyone agreed, and he would know his luck. But even if he didn't she had no intention of persuading Raymond to abandon his vision in order to turn himself into a Froding hack. Let the sky fall first. She began to draw him on what he intended. He needed no urging. Half an hour brought them to Church Street and the shop of the magnolia.

The magnolia was still in the window.

Raymond left Ottilie outside, to stroll in Church Street while he negotiated his purchase.

He fought a prolonged and masterly engagement, but though in the end he obtained the magnolia for less than was asked, it cannot be said that his victory was a conspicuous one.

For the jade, as we know, fifteen guineas was being asked. Every shilling by which Raymond could reduce this figure meant so much added to the meagre store which, for several months to come, was to keep him alive; while every shilling that he could not get knocked off meant so much less bread and cheese for him and so many fewer cigarettes. It was natural that he should do his best for himself.

He began by affecting a great interest in an old red-lacquer cabinet which he had seen a few days

230 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

earlier. Was forty pounds still the price? Yes? Alas! He'd feared as much. He sighed, pulled out the drawers and peeped into them; knuckled the top of the cabinet; and said that No, it couldn't be done. Altogether above his mark, he was afraid. But perhaps the shopman had more red lacquer? The shopman had; produced a tray, a mirror and a chair. Raymond frowned at these things; waved them away with the air of a Morgan dismissing a dubious Raphael. Not his period, he said. He disputed awhile with the shopman about the merits of the chair; admitted that it was a pleasant piece enough. Not just his period, however. Well, he was sorry. Perhaps he'd look in again for that cabinet another day. One never knew one's luck. Suppose a legacy should arrive out of the sky. They hadn't sold that bit of jade yet, he saw. A nice little piece. He'd noticed it the other day when he was looking at that very jolly cabinet. What was it they wanted for it. Twelve pounds? Eleven pounds?

The shopman said its price was fifteen guineas.

Ah yes, so it was, Raymond remembered. Yes, a very nice little piece. But fifteen guineas seemed a bit steep for a smallish jade like this. (He had it in his hand by now.) He should have thought ten or even nine, would be more like it. If it were nine he shouldn't wonder if he'd succumb to it. Quite a nice little piece. Not quite ordinary, eh?

The shopman said that it wasn't at all ordinary. It was, indeed, unique. Never before had the shopman seen one like it. And consider the quality and

colour of the jade! Just about as white as jade could be. Not a spot on it anywhere. And a luscious surface. Luscious! And the carving! They didn't cut jade like that nowadays. Every minute of two hundred years old, this magnolia was. One didn't ask nine and ten guineas for pieces like that. Not exactly.

Raymond admitted the quality and the whiteness, but was not wholly satisfied with the carving. He doubted the age of the piece. Still, it was a very nice piece. He felt that he might like to have it. Would the shopman take twelve pounds for it? No? Well, he should say twelve pounds was quite a reasonable offer. He put the magnolia back on the stand.

The shopman said that twelve pounds might be quite a reasonable offer, but that he considered fifteen guineas was quite a reasonable demand. Raymond turned to leave the shop and, since the shopman made no offer to detain him, turned back again and once more took up the magnolia. He examined it closely, laid it against his cheek, weighed it in his hand, tapped it with his nail. Finally he said that thirteen pounds was his last word.

The shopman said that he'd better give fifteen guineas. He wouldn't get a piece like that anywhere else for under twenty. It was only because they'd got it a bargain themselves that they were able to ask so little. But fifteen guineas was the lowest possible.

Raymond said that if the shopman would split the difference he'd taken the damn thing, for he

really fancied it; but if not, well, he'd have to deny himself. He'd even go to fourteen guineas.

The shopman, who had given seven pounds five shillings for the magnolia, said that it would be a pity if they didn't get together, now they'd got so near; and in order that the gentleman shouldn't be disappointed he'd take the fifteen pounds.

Raymond said: "Wrap it up."

Thus he took out of the shop fifteen shillings of what he had brought into it, and could reckon on a sustentation fund for the next twenty-one weeks not of nine pounds five shillings, but of ten pounds, and consequently on a weekly income, during the same period, not of eight shillings and ninepence three farthings but of nine shillings and sixpence and one-third of a penny.

They carried the magnolia direct from the shop to Mendoza's.

IV

Anfitrion opened to them. Raymond demanded Mendoza. Anfitrion, with his eyes on Otilie, shook his head. The señor have gone away," he said, "to Espain. Sevilla, I think; but no letteras to go. Nothing. No address. Three week—four week. I don' know."

Raymond uttered a howl of anguish. "My magnolia," he cried. "It'll wither in all that time. I must give it him to-day."

"No possible," said Anfitrion. "Cannot. The señor have gone away lasta night. It ees often so.

He is a very sudden. He makes hees mind up. He go. I estay behine. Yes."

"Come away, Smith," said Raymond 'dismally. "Nothing to do here. Confound him! He might have waited another day. Well, you must keep the magnolia for him, that's all. I couldn't bear to see it about in my room."

She agreed gladly enough and they carried the thing back to Hobbema Studios. On the step they parted, Raymond protesting that his only hope of ever finishing *The South Sea Bubble* lay in his doing it at once.

"If I put it off now," he said, "it'll be fatal. This book has got to be eaten, and I'm going to eat it. And it tastes like stale suet-pudding. One doesn't linger over such stuff. One goes for it, if one has to, and gallops it down and gets it over. To-morrow, please Heaven, I'll have stuffed it all inside me. Until then I shan't have a happy moment. Here's my money for you, Smith; thirteen shillings to add to what's upstairs. I'll keep two bob for current expenses. That makes seven and six I'm entitled to have out of you before this day week. And here's the magnolia. Water it with your tears for the poor devil who's got to plug through Athelney."

V

Ottillie went up the staircase humming happily. All was very well. Only the abrupt departure of Mendoza from Chelsea was unsatisfactory. What a *good thing* it was that she had gone round to thank

234 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

him yesterday! She supposed it was the dancing of the other night that had given him this sudden want of his own country. She hoped his journey would do him good. A little white and strained he had looked yesterday afternoon. A dear soul. What a pretty thought that had been to fix her in his memory. Nice to think that she was accompanying him South. What an odd way to visit Spain! Rather a pleasant one, though. She'd looked well after his jade magnolia for him, bless him! Poor dear old Raymond, how disappointed he was! She supposed she oughtn't to have let him spend all that money on the thing; but how could she forbid it? What a dear lunatic he was!

Here she arrived at the door of her studio. She took her key from her bag, opened the door and went in.

"Oh!" she cried.

The whole place was upside down. Both cupboards were wide open and most of their contents was on the floor. The top of her trunk was raised (the clasp of the lock having been cut off cleanly) and nearly everything it had contained was out of it on the table, on the bed, on the floor.

One thing that the trunk had contained was, however, neither on the table, nor the bed, nor the floor, nor anywhere else in the room. I mean Raymond's money. The workbasket was on its side in the middle of the hearthrug. Its reels of cotton, pin-cushion, needle-case, scraps of silk and cards of wool lay about in all directions. The money was *gone*.

Nothing else had been taken, not the ivory-handled umbrella, not the ivory-framed handbag, not the ivory hatpin. Even the few small brooches and other trinkets which Otilie possessed had been neglected. The thief had been satisfied with the cash and had not laid hands on things of which it might be difficult to dispose. Not the work, one would say, of an habitual criminal.

Nor would I have you believe that Mr. Pietro Visconti was anything of the kind. He had seen a chance and taken it, that's all. Hitherto and for ever afterwards a most respectable young man, he had on this solitary occasion been presented with an irresistible opportunity. It had been just an additional bit of luck for him that he was accustomed to carry in his pocket a strong and very sharp clasp-knife. But so far this knife had always been (and henceforward it always was) the weapon lacking which a gentleman must be at a serious disadvantage if he is, at any time, called upon suddenly to vindicate his honour or defend himself against an enemy. Only this once in all the time it remained in his possession did it sink to the condition of a housebreaker's implement.

Otilie shut the door quickly and fell on her knees beside the workbasket. It was absolutely empty. The person who had helped himself to her property had taken no risk of leaving any coin behind. The basket, before being thrown down, had obviously been inverted and shaken; hence the wide distribution over the floor of its ordinary contents.

CHAPTER XVI

I

OTTILIE made no attempt to deceive herself about the certainty of her loss. She wasted no time in futile searching for what she knew was gone beyond all hope.

She jumped up and fell upon the heaped contents of her trunk and rummaged madly until she discovered a small holland bag, well stuffed. This she opened and shook out on to the table. A cascade of stockings emerged. Two of these were old things of grey thread, the legs all run in ladders and the feet considerably darned. In one of them a knot had been tied. This stocking she snatched and unfastened it. She plunged her hand down to its toe and produced an envelope. This she opened and "Thank God for that!" she exclaimed.

In the envelope was the money which she had extorted from Punchester—ten pounds in two notes.

"If I'd only had the sense," she muttered, "to put the rest in here! If only Raymond hadn't been in such a hurry! If only—oh, bah!" She replaced her wealth in its envelope, the envelope in its stocking, the stocking in its bag, and crammed in the rest of the pile on top. Then, quite methodi-

cally, she began to repack her trunk. When she had done this she put the cupboards straight. Then she unwrapped the magnolia and set it up on the chimney-piece.

She had done these things in a daze, yet slowly and quite faithfully. Everything had been put back in its proper place; each garment had been smoothed out and folded with the care which she commonly used towards it. She had worked, on instinct, to keep herself from indulging in seductive stupidities—wringing her hands, beating her head against the wall and the like. That was how she must *not* conduct herself. The refilling of trunk and cupboards offered a refuge for her self-respect. She accepted it and was rewarded for her choice. Gradually her first panic subsided; gradually she emerged from swimming mists of terror and rage; gradually the touch and disposition of familiar, commonplace objects restored her to a sense of the real. Malicious devils for their sport no longer hunted her, shrieking, up and down. Once again she was herself, a human person with a will and an intelligence, the Captain of her Soul, the Marshal of her own Resources, the Director of her own Activities.

She set the magnolia to advantage on the chimney-piece, considered it deliberately, deliberately altered its position and again, and again, until she was thoroughly satisfied. The importance of getting it placed aright was inestimable. This way and that she turned it, standing it here, standing it there, *standing it somewhere else*. At last it pleased her

238 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

fully. She gave it a parting small pat of approval and turned to seat herself at the table.

The time had come for considering her situation.

She took a pencil and paper and began to write and do little sums. At the end of half an hour she had produced what follows:—

STATEMENT OF MY POSITION.

I have to account to R. for £9 5 0 which has been stolen
 plus 0 13 0 which he gave me just now

In all £9 18 0

I have here £10 0 0 which I got from Punchester
 2 0 3 which I had in my purse
 0 13 0 which R. gave me just now.

In all £12 13 3

This leaves me, beyond what I owe R £12 13 3
 less 9 18 0
 £2 15 3

I shall get no more money till the first of September, when Punchester will pay me two pounds six shillings and three pence on publication of my first drawing in *The Useless*.

To-day is the twelfth of July.

The twelfth of July to the first of September is seven weeks and two days.

I have therefore two pounds fifteen shillings and three pence to last me seven weeks and two days.

This gives me one shilling and a penny a day, or seven and seven pence a week. Can I live on that?

If I want more I must (a) pawn something; (b) ask R. to help me; (c) get a further advance from P.

I hate the idea of pawning things; but if I have to, I will.

I don't think P. will give me any further advance and it would be bad business to ask him. But if I have to, I will.

If I tell R. that I'm bust he will want me to share his money.

At present he has only just enough to live on if he's to do good work. And he *must* do good work.

If I take any of his money it may mean that he won't do his best work. And he *must* do his best work. Therefore I mustn't let him help.

But after the first of September I hope to begin selling my stuff to other magazines than the *U*. Suppose I borrow from R. enough to keep me going until I do. Then I can pay him back.

But suppose I *don't* sell my stuff right off. Suppose I don't sell it at all. Then I shall only have my two pounds six shillings and four pence a month from the *U*. If I can stick it till the first of September I shall have eleven and sixpence three farthings a week afterwards.

But at the end of September I shall have my rent to pay—eight pounds.

Unless, therefore, I can sell one or two drawings between the first and the twenty-fifth of September, I shall have to clear out of here. And then what?

No, I can't ask R. to lend me any of his money now, because I may not be able to pay him back in September; and that would mean that he won't have proper nourishment while he's working on this commission. And he *must* have proper nourishment.

Besides, if he knows that I'm hard up he'll worry *about me*. That's certain. And just now he

240 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

mustn't have anything to worry him or he won't do his best work. He'll always be wanting me to take more and more of his money; and if I refuse he'll be miserable. I know he will. And he *mustn't* be miserable.

Conclusion—(a) I mustn't let R. know; (b) I must stick it somehow till the first of September; (c) I must sell at least two drawings during September.

Query I.—Pawning.

Well, we shall see about that. If it becomes necessary, perhaps. But I believe I can manage without it. Milk and bread are very nourishing, and for one and a penny one can buy a lot of milk and bread.

Query II.—Punchester.

Well, we shall see about that too. But not if I can help it.

The chief thing is to keep R. happy and as well fed as possible.

He *must* make a success of these illustrations.

Thank goodness I have my ivory umbrella and bag. The hatpin too.

Thank goodness I have that half-tin of biscuits left and that Camembert and some of the cocoa.

Thank goodness Mendoza will be back in a few weeks.

I wouldn't mind borrowing from Mendoza a bit.

II

"Yes," she said aloud when she had finished reading her Statement through. "It seems pretty

clear that I must get hold of some extra money as soon as I can. On the whole I should say I'd better see what the pawnshop will do for me. How does one pawn things? Well, that's what I've got to find out. It'll be rather a joke," she told herself encouragingly while she compelled a smile to come upon her lips.

She glanced at her trunk.

"No," she said, "the first thing to do is to make that money safe." She opened the trunk and drew out her stocking-bag. Soon she had her two five-pound notes between her fingers. She put them in an envelope and added, from her purse, her own two pounds and three pence and the thirteen shillings in silver which Raymond had saved out of the magnolia-seller's clutches. Then she opened her blouse and pinned the envelope to the front of her stays. It didn't feel very comfortable there, but it felt very safe.

Then she had another thought. "A heap of Raymond's money was in silver. When he comes for more he may want to see it, and gloat upon it. I must get the same kind of money that he left. Let me see. It was one five-pound note and four pounds five shillings in silver, wasn't it? Yes, that's right. But the banks are all shut now. I shall have to do it at the butcher's on my way back from the pawnshop. Shall I take the umbrella or the bag?"

While she debated this question still another thought came into her mind. That it should have delayed *its arrival* so long shows the extent of her

recent demoralisation and the fierceness of her struggle to overcome it. Not until this moment had it occurred to her that possibly the police might be able to get her money back for her.

She laughed aloud at herself. Hope sprang up singing within her and at once she was redistributing a reintegrated and perfectly sufficient fund between its owners.

"I must have been struck silly," she thought. "Was there ever such a fool! I ought to have been round at the station within three minutes. Still this doesn't make the pawnshop unnecessary."

She took her ivory-handled umbrella out of the trunk; put back the stocking-bag; then lifted the jade down from the mantel-piece and buried it among the stockings. She closed the trunk. She left the studio; made very sure that the door was locked; and went on her way.

She began to prepare her story for the Inspector.

"What beats me," she thought, "is how they got in. The lock of the door is all right. The door was locked when I got back just now. The window's far too high. The chimney's far too small. I know I shut the door when Raymond and I came out. That's absolutely certain. I heard it click and I pushed it. But of course!—Raymond went back for the umbrella. He simply didn't shut the door after him. That's it. And someone came along, saw the door open, went in, and set to work. But who? Well, that's for the police to find out."

Evolving theories, she hastened her steps and

presently the police-station came in view. Within a hundred yards of it she suddenly halted.

"But," she had thought, "I shall have to drag Raymond in. Perhaps he *did* shut the door and remembers doing it. In any case they'll want to see him. I shall have to tell them he went up there. And if I have to bring him to see them I shall have to tell him all about it. And if he *did* leave the door open, as he must have done, he'll never forgive himself and it'll upset him most dreadfully, and he must *not* be upset. And he'll want to share his money with me; and he shall *not* do that."

She turned and hastened away from the police-station. Not there might she look for help.

The pawnshop remained.

Now it is no easy matter to go, for the first time, into a pawnbroker's establishment, if, that is to say, you approach the owner of it, not in order to exchange your money for his second-hand curiosities, but with a view to obtaining his money upon the security of your own portable property. A functionary essential to the existence of an enormous part of the community, the pawnbroker figures in the eyes of those who do not use him as a shark, a blackguard, and a person with whom it is a disgrace to have dealings. This could only happen in a society where it is considered shameful to be short at any time of ready money, and where the most honourable man is he who has managed to divert into his own pocket the largest share of the public wealth. Such a way of regarding pawnbrokers is *manifestly wrong*, for in all but the size of the trans-

244 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

actions and the nature of the pledges he takes, he differs no whit from the first respectable Churchgoer you may meet whose superabundant income is derived from unimpeachable mortgage investments. Nevertheless the prejudice exists and shows no sign of dying out, and it nearly always causes serious embarrassment to anyone whose feet Necessity urges upon their first journey to the sign of the Three Brass Balls.

Ottilie was a very sensible girl and her regard for the conventions was small; yet, when it came to the point, she found the simple, plain, prudent and perfectly legitimate act of popping her umbrella extremely hard to accomplish. For a long time she wandered in the King's Road, nerving herself to enter one of its many pawnshops; and again and again she faltered at a door and, after pretending to examine the contents of a window, turned away. It was not that she feared particularly to be seen by somebody who knew her, for she had hardly any acquaintances in Chelsea, and for the opinion of those she had she cared nothing at all; while Raymond, she knew, was busy forcing his way through *The South Sea Bubble*. It was rather the critical corporate vigilance of that section of Society to which she still belonged—the Regular Non-Pawners, the Chronically Un-hard-up—that seemed concerned with her movements and to be waiting to mark and reprobate her downfall. The eyes of a creditable world bored into her back.

Ultimately she caught sight of herself in a plate-glass window, slinking guiltily along. Thereupon

she laughed, and with her laughter her confidence returned. Yet another pawnshop hung out its invitation, and this time she accepted it.

She pushed open the door boldly and entered. She found herself in a place that seemed half a jeweller's shop and half that of a dealer in the cheapest and most disastrous kind of ornamental vases.

Behind the counter stood a youth with oiled hair and an imitation diamond collar-stud. He was polishing a silver cup. He favoured her with a welcoming smile and looked expectant. "Yes, miss?" he said affably.

She said; "I want to pawn this umbrella. How much will you give me for it?"

He answered, "Up the court on the left, outside." The department he adorned had nothing, yet, to say to that umbrella. He resumed his polishing, irritably.

She hesitated. "I don't understand," she said, "I thought this was——"

"So it is," he said rudely and without looking up. "But not *this* end, see? Pledges up the court on the left, as I *said*. Outside, see?"

"Oh," said Otilie, flushing. "I see." His manner affected her painfully. Never before, in all her life, had she been addressed like this. She thought, poor child, that even this common little creature despised her because she wanted to pawn her umbrella, whereas the truth of the matter was that she had grievously wounded the self-respect of an *expert salesman*.

She turned and got out of the shop as quickly as she could. Once more she stood on the pavement of the King's Road. Tears, to her extreme annoyance, were in her eyes, tears of anger; tears of shame; tears of disappointment. It still had to be done. Everybody in the King's Road seemed to be staring at her. To escape from their eyes she darted up a narrow passage which offered itself immediately to her left.

"Oh," she was thinking, "why ever didn't I wait till it was dark?"

She pulled out her handkerchief and angrily dried her eyes; consulted her pocket-mirror; repaired ravages. Twenty feet away, beyond the mouth of her refuge, the King's Road roared by on its affairs. Its indifference suddenly daunted her. What did it care? What did anyone care? A sense of appalling loneliness and helplessness invaded her. A storm of wrath against Ardle surged up in her heart. Despair came to whisper in her ear. The stuffy, dark tunnel in which she stood seemed to be closing in upon her from all directions. It was a trap—a trap. She had much ado to keep herself from screaming. She dug her fingers into their palms, shut her eyes and stood a moment, swaying on her feet.

The visitation passed. She came to herself, staring at a board on which were painted the words "Pledges taken." It was fastened to the wall beside a dirty doorway, beyond which the beginnings of a wooden staircase, a short passage and a closed door were vaguely visible amidst gloom. And as

she looked, this door swung open and a frowsy old woman came through it, peering at something in her hand, muttering discontent. As she lurched past Otilie she gave her a suspicious glare and closed her hand quickly. The King's Road received her.

Otilie had a gruesome feeling that she had seen herself forty years hence. She shivered and gave a little gasp.

"Here!" she said aloud, "Pull yourself together. This is no way to be going on. Do it! *Do it!*"

She put up her chin and advanced resolutely through the doorway, gripping her umbrella with both hands. When she came to the door at the end of the passage she pushed it at once. It gave inwards. She swept through it.

Beyond a counter, in his shirt sleeves and wearing a very small cap of check cloth, sat a gross, bald-headed man who slowly laid down the paper biography of the pugilist Thomas Sharkey which he had been reading and stared at her in dull amazement.

The squalor of the ill-lit, stuffy place daunted Otilie, turned her sick. But she meant to go through with it now.

"Is this where one pawns things?" she inquired, not very boldly.

The People's Banker perceived at the same moment that he had to do with a novice, and a lady at that—in short the fairest of fair game. He believed that this girl was much more anxious to get her business with him done than to secure good

terms for herself. The place where *she* wanted to be was the King's Road. The amount of money she should carry away with her was, compared with speedy escape, a matter of small moment. She would not bargain. She would not plead. She would take whatever he might offer and be thankful. He understood also that her need was pressing. Not else would she be here at all. This was *all* right.

He held out a hand in silence and received the umbrella. He examined it casually and decided that, as an unredeemed pledge, it could stand a three-pound-ten price-ticket, and would probably fetch not less than two pounds.

"Eight shillings," he said.

"Eight shillings!" Otilie cried. "I gave five pounds for it."

He glowered at her. "Eight shillings," he repeated in a voice unnecessarily loud. "If you want it, say so. If yer don't it's a free country." He put the umbrella on the counter and resumed his biography. A firm hand, that was what this situation required.

A hot anger began to burn in Otilie's cheeks, not at the fellow's insolence, not at his greed, but at his evident assumption that she was a fool. Eight shillings! She'd rather starve than let him have her precious umbrella for eight shillings.

She snatched it off the counter and turned, without a word, to go.

He looked up quickly, dismayed. "'Ere!" he cried. "Not so fast, miss. If eight bob ain't enough for yer, wy, I won't say but wot I can

do yer a bit more, if it come to that. Less 'ave another——"

The door swung back and interposed itself between his eyes and her retreating form.

"All right, pepper!" he grumbled. "Jest as you please. Tsall one to me." He lied. It was, to him, a serious reverse. He lied, and knew he lied, with none but himself to hear. What's more, he half believed his own lie, and felt considerably happier for it; which would be a truly astonishing feat were it not so usual. Enough of him.

Ottilie's indignation swept her straight out into the King's Road. No faltering at the court's mouth; no spurring of her resolution; no shivering on the brink for her. Out she came with her head erect and her eyes blazing, and she had travelled a good hundred yards on her homeward road before she realised that "it" had still to be done.

But now her fighting spirit was up. Circumstance, if it had resolved to humble this confident young person, had gone altogether wrong in its latest choice of an instrument. With some young persons a bullying pawnbroker might have served well enough. Not with this young person. Though Ottilie would have rejected the suggestion with scorn, one may be allowed to suppose that it was some ancestral Froling who had removed her so suddenly from the sight of her adversary. In their prime the Frolings had been a conspicuously hot-headed people, always in trouble with the authorities and their neighbours, tenacious of their rights, *stiff-necked under oppression*, champions of what

they imagined to be liberty, in whose cause not a few of them had mounted scaffolds. Had there not been in their blood a saving strain of caution and compromise it is doubtful, indeed, if the race could have survived. That saving strain had, however, cropped up sufficiently often to keep them going and, fostered by a steady increase of possessions, it had ultimately taken full charge of their destinies, until they had become as docile and respectable a family as any in England. But a volcano is not dead because vineyards flourish all over it, and somewhere, no doubt subterraneously, the Froling fire still smouldered, ready to break out. And so it is possible that it asserted itself on this occasion. But of course the Frolings may have had nothing to do with it. The Wigmores may have been responsible. Or somebody else. The point is immaterial. What matters to this tale is that Ottilie, for the moment, had had enough of pawnbrokers.

"I'll be hanged," she told herself, "if I'm going to be done in the eye by these beasts. They think I'm easy prey because I'm decently dressed and speak English better than they do. Well, they can whistle for my ivories. They won't lay their dirty claws on anything of mine yet awhile; not till I'm a great deal harder up than I am at present. It simply means that I've got to get another advance out of Punchester to-morrow. Another ten pounds'll carry me on for months. I'll be making plenty of money long before I come to the end of ten pounds. I'd rather not go to Punchester again; but it's better *than* being swindled by these pawnbrokers."

She marched back to Hobbema Studios.

On her way she changed the money she had with her into a shape which would satisfy Raymond's eye, should he desire to contemplate his wealth.

It was necessary for her to have four pounds five shillings in silver to lie beside one five-pound note in her work-basket, where the thirteen shillings in silver which Raymond had given her must also repose.

She brought home with her in her hand bag a very considerable weight of coined money.

III

As soon as she was safe in her studio she got from her work-basket a strip of canvas which she had bought to back her belts with, and out of it made a long, thin, flat bag. Within this she disposed Raymond's money as evenly as possible. Her own (except one shilling and one penny) she placed in an envelope, which she folded over and over upon itself and pinned together with a safety-pin. Then, with other safety-pins, she attached bag and envelope to the front of her stays and fastened her blouse upon them.

She had no intention of being robbed again if she could help it.

Then she went out and bought six pennyworth of milk at the dairy, and seven pennyworth of bread at a baker's. Upon this food she proposed to live until the *same time* on the morrow.

252 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

The weight of the coin she carried loaded her down, and soon its pressure made it harder for her to breathe. The money in the long bag gradually slipped and gathered itself together into two uneven, wobbling lumps. She was very glad to get back with her provisions to Hobbema Studios. Evidently the bag for Raymond's money would have to be elaborated; given partitions which would keep the coins reasonably separate. That should be her next job.

On the floor of the studio was a letter, dropped through the slot by the postman during her absence. It was from Punchester and read:

MY DEAR MISS WIGMORE,—I regret very much that we shall be unable to produce your first drawing until the October issue of *The Useless* magazine. Carrick's drawing (the last we shall do) is a rather elaborate thing, and the colour-blocks have all been made and represent a considerable outlay. The Editor says, and I agree with him, that we cannot well afford to scrap them, especially as the drawing is a very charming thing, of much better quality than Carrick has been giving us of late. This, though it in no wise affects my decision to let Carrick go, does naturally weigh with me, and so I have given instructions that your drawing is to be held over until October. However, it means only one month's delay, so I do hope you will not be too seriously disappointed. With most kind regards,

Sincerely yours, ALBERT PUNCHESTER.

Ottilie, as she read this civil communication, bit down very hard on her lower lip, and so it didn't tremble.

Another facer. Perhaps the worst yet. This reduced her to sixpence ha'penny a day. And sixpence ha'penny a day simply wasn't possible. Something would have to be pawned after all. Well, well, there it was.

Suddenly she thought: "But of course I was going to get some more on account from Punchester. This'll make it quite easy. He can't say No now." And immediately she plucked up heart. For with, say, another ten or even five pounds, she told herself, she would be in clover.

Then she took the money from her blouse and put it away in the trunk; took the jade magnolia out of the trunk and put it in its place on the mantelshelf.

Then she sat down resolutely at her table and began to work on *The Nursery* and worked till the light grew too dim for her to see clearly.

Then, since illumination costs money, she went to bed.

But first she ate one quarter of her bread and drank one quarter of her milk.

CHAPTER XVII

I

BECAUSE transportation costs money (unless one is one's own vehicle) Otilie walked to Queen Anne's Gate next morning.

Half-an-hour's stitching on her money-bag had made it a rather less uneasy burden, but its weight, though it remained more evenly distributed, was still very oppressive. With every step she took it became harder to fill her lungs with any comfort. The day was hot and close and the distance she had to travel was not a small one. When she reached the house of the Righteous Man she looked like a little ghost. Fortunately he let her wait a full three quarters of an hour. The respite was very welcome.

A glass of water, which she obtained from Bessie, helped her too, and she had things in her handbag with which she was able a good deal to improve her appearance. But even after her long rest in an armchair by the open window of the waiting-room she looked none too brisk, and Punchester, as she came in through his door, perceived, not without satisfaction, that, as an adversary, she was less worthy of respect than she had been.

"So sorry," he said as he handed her to a chair.

"So very sorry to have been compelled to keep you downstairs all this time." He didn't think it necessary to say that he had been reading *The Times*. "You got my letter?" he inquired. "Yes? I'm afraid it's a disappointment to you, Miss Wigmore. But the expense of those colour-blocks cannot be ignored. *The Useless* is not a philanthropic adventure. It has to——"

"Mr. Punchester," she broke in, "I'm not blaming you at all. I don't expect you to throw away money for my sake. But I happen to have lost what you gave me on account the other day, and I can't get on for two months longer with what I have."

Punchester's eye gleamed.

"You've lost it?" he exclaimed, while he struggled, not wholly without success to keep the note of satisfaction out of his voice. "But, my dear young lady, this is dreadful. Dreadful indeed! How on earth——"

"It doesn't matter how I did it," she said. To tell him that her money had been stolen would involve explaining why she had not applied to the police. She didn't care to explain that to Punchester or anything.

"But you'll get it back. If it has fallen into the hands of any honest person— The police— An advertisement——"

"No," she said, "it's gone—finally. It can't be got back."

"I profess," he said, "that I don't see——"

"Well," she said, "it doesn't matter. What's wa-

portant is that I need another advance from you. Ten pounds will be quite enough."

Punchester put his fingers and thumbs together and pursed up his mouth.

"I'm afraid," he said sorrowfully, "that you haven't quite grasped how greatly we were departing from our practice when we agreed to make you that advance the other day. We don't do it, Miss Wigmore. Payment on publication, on the *day* of publication, is our practically invariable custom. We never keep our contributors waiting for their money. In return we expect them to be satisfied to receive it when their work is used and not before. That is only business, and in this imperfect work one has to be business-like or go under. The very exceptional circumstances in which the failure of Ardle's Bank placed you caused me to act, in the matter of that advance, in a way which, as the director of *The Useless Magazine*, I could not approve. For once, however, I was willing to stretch a point. Your youth, your sex, your talent——"

"You mean, Mr. Punchester," said Ottilie steadily, "that you refuse to help me again."

"Far from it, Miss Wigmore. Far from it, and God forbid that you should think so! On the contrary, I am only too anxious to help. But it can't be done in the way you propose. *The Useless Magazine* can make no further advance."

"Well," she asked, "what do *you* propose?"

"Why," he said smiling benevolently, "even though, as a publisher, I am forced to draw tight my purse-strings, may I not, as a collector, still be of

some use to you. *The Useless Magazine*, Miss Wigmore, is the purchaser of your copyrights only. The originals——”

“Ah!” cried Ottilie joyfully. “Now why didn’t I think of that? But I had an idea that you didn’t want my originals. I’m sure you said so.”

“It’s true,” he replied, “that I am more anxious to enrich *The Useless* than to add to my already large collection of black-and-white drawings. Still, if I can acquire these originals from you at a reasonable figure, I may be glad to have them. I must own that I like to have a few examples of the actual penwork of every one whose drawings appear in *The Useless*. In short, I shall be happy to buy these twelve drawings from you, given that we can come to terms. As you may not have a very decided idea of the prices which rule for such things, perhaps I had better suggest a figure.”

He paused. She met his eye and read his purpose in it, but she made no sign. She couldn’t afford to make any sign. He was going to jew her out of her originals, now that he had got her at his mercy. Well, it would have to be. If the copyrights were worth thirty-six guineas, he’d hardly have the impudence to offer much less. Well, if he said twenty-four, she’d take it.

“Go on,” she said.

II

“The value of original drawings,” he began, “is a thing not very easy to determine. In *The*

Useless your work will fill its page and create its impression on the public. As *The Useless* goes in for quality alone and cares nothing for famous signatures, the value to it of a drawing by 'Otilie' is decided singly by the measure of the impression which we calculate that drawing will produce. We take our risk month by month. We publish you to-day; we pay you; and so far as *The Useless* is concerned all is over. Twenty years hence we shall be no better or worse off because of the transaction. Twenty years hence you may be the most famous black-and-white artist alive and we shall be able to sell no more copies on the strength of having published you when you were unknown. Or you may have married and given up your art, you may have died and you may be wholly forgotten. Such circumstances will not affect our sales twenty years hence.

"But when it is a question of buying originals, a different set of considerations arises.

"For the purpose of valuing pictures, name is absolutely everything. A rough pencil sketch, authentically by Whistler, is worth perhaps ten pounds. A masterpiece by an equal or even a superior of Whistler, of whom nobody knows, will not fetch as many shillings. A drawing made by our friend Mendoza, when he was a young artist struggling along in Paris, would now sell for, I daresay, fifty guineas. When he made it, he would have been glad to part with it for five francs. Supposing he had done so and supposing that he had not achieved a colossal reputation, the same drawing would to-

day probably be little better than waste paper to its owner.

"You, Miss Wigmore, as I needn't be afraid, I think, to point out, are to-day quite unknown. If I buy your originals I am bound to bear that fact in mind. Though I have the greatest confidence in your future and look to see you come very rapidly to the front, still the possibility exists that you may not do so. Say that I buy your *Lady in Bed* to-day. Twenty years hence it may be worth a hundred pounds, two hundred—how can I say? On the other hand it may not be worth a guinea, and simply because the signature at its foot will still be not famous.

"Originals then, you see, are always a gamble. In your case, because of my belief in your future, I am prepared to risk my money. But you are too sensible a girl to expect me to risk very much of it. The chances are always heavily against appreciation of value; heavily, indeed, in favour of loss.

"I will give you six guineas for the twelve drawings which *The Useless* is to publish."

III

In the room there was a short but pregnant silence, while Punchester permitted his leaven to work and Ottilie restrained herself from speech.

At last she got up. "Why, Mr. Punchester," she said with a laugh, "I should never forgive myself if you were to suffer a serious loss through me. As you say, it's always possible that I may die or

lose my sight or injure my hand or simply not come off; and it would be frightful if you were to find yourself out of pocket over these drawings. Perhaps we'd better wait until there's more certainty about me. I expect I shall manage somehow. Good day, Mr. Punchester."

He made no advance upon his offer; he remained unaffected by her irony. This was no vulgar bullying pawnbroker, startled by an abrupt and unexpected refusal. The Righteous Man was quite pleased to bide his time. He felt pretty certain that it would come. The girl looked fairly ill, he thought.

"Just as you please, Miss Wigmore," he said pleasantly, as he got up and opened the door for her, "and I sincerely hope that you'll find things not so difficult as you, perhaps, fear. But my offer stands. You have only to let me know that you accept it. Perhaps I should tell you that I'm going abroad at the end of the month. On the thirty-first, to be exact. Good day to you, Miss Wigmore. Good day."

He closed the door on her softly and went back to his table. From a drawer he took the box of long cigars, chose one carefully, lit it, and leaning back in his chair gave himself up to agreeable thoughts.

"A week," he murmured presently. "She has pluck, I'll say that for her; but I give her a week. If this was winter, she'd be back here to-morrow. It's easier to starve than to freeze."

CHAPTER XVIII

I

THE Righteous Man's calculation was not confirmed by events.

A week passed by, two weeks, and still Ottilie's originals remained her own property. Not a sign had she given that her humour had grown more accommodating. The unknown, which had produced her, had taken her again to itself. But for that dozen of micrographical achievements in pen and ink which, from time to time, he took out of their wrapping and lovingly studied, Punchester could have supposed that he had dreamed about the girl. He was much too experienced to make any movement of invitation. That was not the way to bend the back of recalcitrant Youth. "Let her sweat!" said the Righteous Man. "She'll come to heel presently."

But she did not come to heel.

Time ran on and the day fixed for his going abroad drew near. This day was, as always, the thirty-first of July. Pontracina was his destination. He looked forward eagerly to his month in the mountains. The heat of London this July had been out of the common damnable. He felt thoroughly

jaded. But it was always so in July. The labour of passing his August number and getting the September number sufficiently advanced for him to be able to leave it quite happily in Marlow's hands was always immense. This year it had seemed to tax him more than ever before. But the result was going to justify the effort. The August number was well up to the mark. The September number went easily beyond it. That drawing of Carrick's, for instance, was quite the best thing the fellow had contributed for months. He must have repented of his recent conduct to have sent that drawing in; thought better of it. Well, he had repented just a trifle too late. *The Useless* did not propose to attend upon the second thoughts of any swollen-headed young artist, especially when it had a draftsman like Ottilie to put in his place. But Carrick's Swan Song would do both him and *The Useless* considerable credit, and that was dramatically right.

Meanwhile the said Ottilie remained invisible. Punchester didn't worry. He was confident that she would turn up before the thirty-first. She would, in the known condition of her finances, hardly let six guineas go off to Pontracina for a month, six guineas that were hers for the asking. She would turn up. And if she didn't, no matter. Let her sweat. By September she would be quite tame. Quite. He was going to get the drawings at his own price all right, either now or in September. No question of it. Everything came to him who could wait. He only hoped the girl wouldn't be fool enough to try to carry on too long. An extra-

ordinary artist. A pity if she should make herself ill. But she wouldn't do that. Plenty of sense in that small body. She'd appear in a day or two, asking to feed out of his hand. Do her good, it would. Yes. Nothing for incipient swelled head like a little hard living. Led to right thinking, hard living did. Meanwhile one could only wonder how she was managing.

Raymond Adkin too. How was he managing? There was another disappearance. Nothing from Raymond for a good fortnight. Never yet had he been so long without coming to exchange a book-cover or two for a cheque. It was to be hoped that he too wasn't getting a swelled head. Yet it might be so. At any rate he might have begun to think that he would like a little higher pay; in which case it might occur to him, with his unassertive temperament, that his best plan would be to hold aloof for a while; wait for money to hunt him, instead of himself hunting it. It was easier to open one's mouth to an eager purchaser than to one who had to be courted. Well, let *him* sweat, too. It wouldn't be long before he came to his oats. That last three guineas he'd had must be pretty well exhausted by now. With another perhaps not, but with Raymond, a mere imbecile where his own interests were concerned, with a generous-hearted fool like that, three guineas would be gone before one could turn round. Oh yes, he'd be rolling in presently with some covers. He knew that he, Punchester, was going abroad *on the thirty-first*. He wouldn't let that happen

without getting hold of some money to carry him through September. Probably that was the explanation of his absence. He was preparing a whole lot of covers, six or eight of them, perhaps more, and he'd be bringing them along in a day or two. What were the next on the list?

Punchester, seated at his work table, sought for and found a typed catalogue of book-names. The first twenty of these had been crossed out in pencil.

"Yes," he reflected, reading on, "'Ben Jonson' (second shot), Defoe's 'Plague Year,' 'Peter Schlemihl,' 'Hakluyt,' 'The Canterbury Tales,' 'Benvenuto Cellini,' 'Dead Souls,' 'The Heptameron,' 'Leaves of Grass'—I wonder if he'll have done as many as that. Some great inspirations there for Raymond. No, he'll hardly have managed ten. Say eight. That'll make twenty-eight. When he's done forty it'll really be about time to begin to think seriously of making him. Suppose we put him on *The Useless* next vacancy—say a year hence. Create a vacancy if necessary. He'll accept any terms I offer him for a place on *The Useless*; say, a guinea a time and originals thrown in. A great thing, gratitude, if you know how to inspire it and profit by it. And then we'll have that show of book-covers. My forty'll be enough, but he'd better have something else, to sell. Say we have the show two years hence. By that time he'll have heaps of extra stuff done; stuff he'll have had published in other magazines. Good! Good! And meantime I'll have acquired plenty more. Plenty more. Plenty. Yes."

There is this to be said for the Righteous Man—he made no pretences with himself. One ought always to give the devil his due, and so it is only fair to point out that there was at least one person in the world for whom Punchester did not at any time assume the mask of benevolence.

But the days slipped by and Raymond and his book-covers continued not to make their appearance. By the twenty-eighth of the month Punchester was disturbed. By the twenty-ninth he was alarmed. Was the fellow ill, perhaps? So concerned did he become at last that policy had to give way. In the afternoon he sent Raymond a reply-paid telegram: "Like see you before go abroad thirty-first. Hope not ill."

The answer came next morning: "Quite well, but have no more covers—impossible come—explain later—pleasant holiday."

"Now," said the Righteous Man to himself, "what the devil is the meaning of that? Well, let him sweat!"

He went abroad next day without having solved the puzzle.

II

Raymond had not gone to Queen Anne's Gate, first, because he was busy drawing a very complicated picture of an Eighteenth Century English fair, and, secondly, because he knew that, if he went, he would find it impossible, without offending Punchester to keep him ignorant of the Froling commission. And this he had promised to do. Why

old Froling should want Punchester, particularly, not to be told was no concern of his. But in any case he didn't want to tell Punchester. He wanted to give Punchester a jolly surprise. The thing was bound to leak out, of course, long before the book should be published, but the longer it took the bigger surprise it would be. It would be far jollier if Punchester could be kept in the dark until the illustrations were done or practically done. He would be thunderingly pleased, of course even now when the job was only beginning; but how much more satisfactory for him it would be to hear about it when it was as good as finished! That would prove to the decent soul that his kindness had not been thrown away on a loafer.

But meanwhile it was going to be rather difficult to keep him in the dark. A bit of a prober, Punchester. He'd want to know, for instance, why no more book-covers were forthcoming. It would probably be necessary to do some for him. But not just now. Now one wasn't in the mood for book-covers. A good thing Punchester was going abroad for August. During August one might find time to do a few covers, just to shut his mouth when he got back in September.

Anyhow, Queen Anne's Gate seemed to be a good place to keep away from for the present and as long as possible afterwards.

During the latter half of July Raymond worked as he had never worked before. This commission had transformed him.

His fiddle remained idle in its case. His organist

friend in Pimlico saw nothing of him. No time for music now.

When he wasn't drawing he was away in search of material, haunting, with his notebook, the museums and the libraries. He knew precisely where to go and what to look for. His *Shandy* drawings had forced him to learn his way pretty thoroughly about the places where his period could be studied. He lost no time, now, as he had done over the *Shandys*. If it was a sword-hilt he wanted, a snuff-box, a picture-frame, a mirror, an occasional-table, a wig, a print of Cheapside—he could go straight to it. He walked leagues while making these journeys, for what he had allowed himself out of his advance didn't permit of many 'bus rides. The exercise kept him well and in good appetite. He thrived on bread and cheese and work. His steam was up and the engine was running well. He was as happy as a lord.

The only worry he knew was the peaked look that Smith had. He saw her every day when he came round in the evening for his money, and every day he was less and less satisfied with her. She was getting thin, there could be no doubt about it. Her eyes had a darkness under them which had not formerly been there. She lacked lustre. Her voice was as pale as her face. He supposed it was this infernal hot weather. London was a rotten place for a girl in summer. She ought to be at the seaside, bathing and lying about in the sun. And why not? She had plenty of coin. Two hundred a year, she'd said, *hadn't she?* And she could do her work

as well by the sea as anywhere else; better in fact. It wasn't as if she needed models. Drew everything straight out of her head. Invented every detail. No need for her to be hanging about in museums and libraries. That was the best of fantastic work like hers. The more unreal the patterns of her chair covers or the design of her lamps were, the better. At any rate, sticking here in London was doing her no sort of good.

He told her so at last.

"What you want, Smith," he said, "is to get out of this stuffy hole and fill yourself up with fresh air. Why don't you go down to the sea till September? There's nothing doing in London. All the fashionables are away. Why not nip over to Dinard or Trouville, where you'll find them again? They're your quarry. You ought to be studying them for all you're worth instead of stewing here and knocking yourself up. It's my opinion you're not eating enough. And how are you to have an appetite in a Turkish bath like this? It suits *me* all right, but I don't care how hot it gets. Never did. Besides, I've got to stay in London for my work. But you haven't. Get out, Smith, get out."

She shook her head. "No," she said, "I should be miserable away from here. I must get on with my drawings. I must have something ready to sell to the other magazines if they want them, when *The Useless* publishes the Lady in Bed. This summer's bathing costumes'll be no good to me. I've got to dress my out-of-door people in furs if I'm to sell them this autumn. But I'm going to stick

to interiors for a time. Interiors and dressing-gowns can be published at any season."

"Well, you can do them by the sea."

"No, Jones. No. I want to be in my studio. I couldn't work in a seaside lodgings. I'd be wasting all my time on the beach. I'm frightfully lazy, really. If I'm to get anything done I must stay here. And if I were to go away, what would happen to *you*? If I left your money in your own hands, you'd blow it all in a week. You'd be arriving down where I was, first thing, to see how I was getting on. You know you would."

"Well, of course I would, and that's a great idea. You needn't go very far away. Perhaps Trouville wouldn't be much of a catch for you; and how about Worthing or Selsey or one of those small places? I could get down and back in the day easily. It wouldn't cost much."

"No, Jones," she said. "You're not going to spend the price of a fortnight's food on coming down to help me pass an hour or two at Selsey. Not a shilling do you get for any such purpose, so you can make up your mind to it."

"But it worries me," he insisted, "to see you so pale and thin. You look thoroughly out of sorts, Smith. Thoroughly. If you stay on in London, through all this heat you'll be making yourself downright ill, you know."

"Not I. I'm tougher than you think."

"All right. Have it your own way. But I tell you you're being an ass. Let the editors whistle a while. It'll do them no harm if they have to

wait for you. With two hundred a year of your own you don't need to care whether you've anything to sell this autumn or not."

Suddenly Ottilie's lip trembled. "Oh," she cried miserably, "do please let me alone, Raymond. I'm perfectly well really, and I don't *want* to go away."

He became contrite at once; promised not to worry her any more; vowed that she should do whatever she pleased; said that all those seaside places would be crammed with people and perfectly beastly. London in August was the quietest place after all. Great for work, London was in August. She'd get heaps of drawings done. Stacks. Fids. So long as she didn't overdo it. Why not come out and sit in Battersea Park for a little now? He wanted a dose of fresh air himself, and it would be pretty good in Battersea Park, now the sun was getting low. She would? Splendid! And please might he have his money. Four shillings, please, this time, because he was out of tobacco.

She went over to her trunk, which stood now always covered with a rug, pretended to unlock it, raised its lid (with the rug carefully draped over the place whence the hasp of the lock had been cut) and told him to come and help himself. He came and chose from the heap of silver in the work-basket a florin, a shilling and two sixpenny pieces.

"My goodness!" he said, "doesn't it last? I wonder how much of it would be left by now if you hadn't taken care of it for me. I'll wait for you downstairs." He went off whistling cheerfully and wondering why girls always seemed to have to

change their clothes before going out of doors. Strange things, girls.

Ottilie filled her money-bag from the work-basket and pinned it away, together with the envelope which contained her own wealth, where one could be sure of its safety. Then she put on another blouse and skirt, and, after hiding the jade magnolia in the trunk, followed Raymond. With her she took her ivory umbrella, and her ivory-framed bag. In her hat was the ivory pin. On her wrist was her watch. No chances for Ottilie!

III

So far the course of diet she had adopted had not produced any very serious effect upon her. She found that she was getting on much better than she had expected with her sixpenny allowance. She felt tired continually; at nights sleep did not come quickly—sometimes not at all—and when it did come she was apt to have rather horrid dreams, and of course her face was getting thinner and her eyes were ringed. But apart from all this she felt pretty well, her appetite was not too troublesome and, above all, she was doing good work. Indeed her powers of invention seemed to have been quickened. The Nursery was going to be a success.

A very deliberate worker was Ottilie. Her method was founded upon (a) a laborious building up of detail and (b) a ruthless rejection of superfluities. Consider for instance this Nursery drawing.

272 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

A girl in a kimono on a sofa with a pack of thirteen toy spaniels—that was the subject.

First, Ottilie had made, in pencil, a rough sketch, fairly large, embodying the general idea. Over this she pored for days rubbing out (for she needed no longer to fear the use of india-rubber) and re-drawing and rubbing out and re-drawing until she had reduced the general idea to something which seemed to her to be shapely. Ten times and more she changed the place on the sofa and the attitude of her young lady, trying her curled up in one corner, then in the other, trying her stretched out at full length, trying her with her knees clasped in her arms, trying her with her feet on the floor and her arms laid out along the back of the sofa. The sofa itself she invented almost as often as its occupant, making it big, small, cushioned, lacquered, modern, Empire, Victorian, until she had obtained a fitting harmony between the lines of the girl's attitude and those of her couch. Then it was the turn of the thirteen dogs. She covered square yards of paper with spaniels in every conceivable attitude and more square yards with trial groups and arrangements of the figures she had already drawn. Then she began to place them round and upon their mistress. Ultimately she was satisfied with their attitudes and positions and put herself to the business of furnishing the room. Other days followed concerned with the invention of tea-tables, lamps, curtains, windows, wardrobes, dressing-tables, rugs, foot-stools. When from her store of sketches she had chosen and put down such few things as

seemed good to her, the first half of her work was done.

There, in the right attitudes, in the right places, on and around the right kind of sofa, and backed by the right pieces of furniture, girl and spaniels sat, lolled, crouched, gambolled, and otherwise rightly conducted themselves.

She now began to consider what she must cut out. Always she found a great deal to cut out, and for days on end she laboured over this task, simplifying and still simplifying until she could simplify no longer.

Then she began to build up her pattern of black and white spots and spaces. More sketches, more trial groups; this time not of spaniels, but of the markings of spaniels; not of kimonos and sofas, but of the designs they carried; not of curtains and wardrobes, but of the embroidery and ebony inlay of these things. And more simplifying.

It was this point which Otilie had now reached. She had still fully to determine the balance as between her spots of black and her spaces of white, and their final relation to each other. Then she would have to reduce everything in pencil, from fifteen inches by nine to five by three, ink in swiftly, and her work would be over.

Yes, the Nursery was going to be well worth the trouble it had cost her. It was going to be easily her best drawing. And she had another two or three in her head with which to follow it. By October she would assuredly have something with which *to meet Success if it should come*. If only she could

stick it till then. What a satisfaction that would be! And how savage it would make Punchester! Six guineas for twelve originals? Not much! Let him go abroad as soon as he pleased. He'd hear nothing from her though he stayed in London all September.

Milk was really wonderful stuff, with an occasional bit of bread, of course.

People ate far more than was really necessary.

And she always had her ivories, if she should begin to feel that she couldn't get on with milk. But she'd have to feel a great deal worse than she did at present before she would let any swindling pawnbroker have her umbrella for eight shillings.

Still, she mightn't be able to stick it. It was good to know that the ivories were still at her disposal.

The grip of her hands on the umbrella and the bag was comforting to her as she emerged into the King's Road and joined Raymond.

Ottilie ought to have been ashamed of herself.

It is sheer stupidity to try to live on a quite insufficient daily allowance of milk and dry bread so long as you have the means of feeding yourself as your body requires. It is, moreover, wicked to refuse to be diddled by pawnbrokers and Punchesters when you can't afford it. Such conduct is rebellious, proud, Satanic. Not at all fitting in a young woman who has absolutely no one but herself to make her way for her in the world. Such a young woman has no right to indulge her pride. She has no right to have any pride. Pride is the possession of the strong. It is the duty of those

who "dwell not in the odour of defencefulness" to cultivate a proper humility and lick the hand that robs them.

I say Otilie ought to have been ashamed of herself.

But we must remember that this was her first serious engagement with Circumstance.

And we must also remember that she came of an uncompromising stock.

IV

Raymond was waiting for her at the bottom of the steps. In his hand was a fat little brown-paper parcel. He held it out to her.

"Here," he said eagerly, "you've got to take this. It's cod-liver oil and malt. It's not a bit bad stuff, really. My mother swears by it. She used to make me eat tons of it in my youth. If you'll give me your key, I'll just run up and leave it in the studio."

Now, as it happened, cod-liver oil and malt was a compound which Otilie had never yet succeeded in swallowing. Her mother, too, had sworn by it; but neither praises, nor blandishments, nor commands had at any time availed to introduce so much as a spoonful into her child's system. With Otilie it simply would not go down.

At the sound of its name a sudden wave of nausea passed through her. She snatched the parcel from Raymond's hand and, without a word hurried indoors again. Once out of his sight, she plumped *herself down*, *leaned* her body against a wall and

closed her eyes. A cold perspiration broke out on her forehead. She felt as if she was going to die. The thought of death was even welcome to her.

This only lasted for a few moments. The sickness went away almost as quickly as it had come. It was succeeded by an equally sudden wave of anger directed against Raymond. What a fool! What a fool! What an infuriating idiot! Offering her his beastly stuff! If he *had* to waste the money she was saving for him, why couldn't he buy her a bit of steak? That was what she wanted. Steak. Meat. Something to bite on. Something that would fill her. Something not milk. But no. He must needs rush off to the chemist's for cod-liver oil. Of all abominable things!

And the deceitfulness of it! Pretending he wanted that extra money for cigarettes, when all the time he was plotting this awful stupidity. Crafty, that was what Raymond was. You couldn't trust him out of your sight for a moment. She hated that kind of sneaking, underhand work and she'd tell him so. He might just look after his own money for the future. She wasn't going to be bothered with it and him any longer. She'd tell him so, too, the ungrateful pig. She'd had enough of him and his concerns. She hoped he'd spend every penny he had in a week and jolly well starve. A little real hunger might teach him some sense. He could go and sit in Battersea Park by himself. The studio was good enough for her. She would go up there and leave him to stew in the street; and when he came up to see what she was doing she'd

hand him his money through the door—yes, and his beastly cod-liver oil too—and shut it in his face. She was done with him. Absolutely.

She got up, rather weakly upon her feet and, viciously clutching her parcel, began her ascent of the stairs. Before she attained the studio her anger had all ebbed away.

A fool? Yes, but what a dear fool! Deceitful? But who was to blame for his deceit? He had known perfectly well that his only chance of getting money out of her, money with which he might buy his dear, absurd, cod-liver oil, was to pretend that he wanted it for cigarettes. Ungrateful? Well, hardly. Ingratitude didn't prompt people to actions of the sort.

She was wondering, now, how she could ever have been angry with him. Blessed, dunder-headed creature! Could she, *could* she get a spoonful down? If she could, it would probably do her a lot of good. Everyone said it was wonderfully nutritious. But could she? How pleased he would be if, when she joined him in the street, she was able to tell him that she had taken a dose of his poison! He was evidently worrying about her. And just now he mustn't be worried about anything. It was the least she could do to try. She would. Hard.

She opened her door and went into the studio.

Resolutely she possessed herself of a spoon; resolutely undid the package; resolutely unscrewed the cap of the bottle and removed the little circle of cardboard which lay below.

278 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

plunged the spoon into the dark, sticky, shining mess. Resolutely she withdrew it.

Swiftly, horribly, the nausea returned.

She laid the spoon down and passed a hand over her forehead. "Oh God!" she moaned. "I can't. I can't. I can't!"

Nor could she.

Twice again she nerved herself to the attempt; twice her will failed her. She had to give it up.

Ultimately, in fear lest he should come after her and find her swithering, she screwed the top on to the bottle, put the spoon away in her scullery and went downstairs.

"Did you try it?" he demanded anxiously. "It's good, eh?"

She nodded. "It's delicious," she said. "I feel three times the man I was already."

"Great!" he exclaimed, "now just you let me know when that bottle's finished and I'll get you another."

"No," she said, "if you do I'll cut you off altogether. It was perfectly wicked of you to buy that stuff for me, when you know how rich I am. Spending your cigarette money like that! I'm very, very angry with you."

He pretended to cower.

"I won't do it again," he said sheepishly, "but you must promise me to get yourself another bottle, or I will."

"All right," she said, "when this one's finished I'll buy another." And she thought: "I can be crafty, too."

"Besides," he explained, "I've given up smoking, you know."

"You lie," she said.

"No, really I have, Smith. It's awful waste, and I feel much better without it."

"How long have you given it up?"

"Well, not very long," he admitted.

"Five minutes?"

He laughed, quite unashamed. "Thereabouts," he said. "But one must begin some time. I've been intending to do it for years, you know. I'm quite certain it's been affecting my heart lately. Honestly I want to stop it for a bit. I only told you I wanted that extra two bob for cigarettes, because otherwise you wouldn't have given it me. But I fairly spoofed you, Smith, didn't I? Ho, ho!"

"Yes," she said, "and you won't do it again. After this I shall have to come and stand over you when you buy cigarettes. Forward!"

She moved away in the direction of the park.

When they came back darkness had fallen. In Oakley Street she opened her blouse surreptitiously, unpinned her envelope and took out a shilling. Then she put her money carefully back in its place. As they came into the King's Road she suddenly darted into a tobacconist's and called for a packet of Gold Flake cigarettes.

Raymond, following, protested vigorously and swore that he wouldn't touch the things. Nevertheless he had to accept them. Most unscrupulously she made this a condition of her buying more cod-liver oil when his bottle should be finished. He

objected that this wasn't fair. There had been nothing about cigarettes in their agreement. She said there was *now*. He had to give in. But she held him at a grave disadvantage. It was hours since he had smoked.

Again Otilie ought to have been ashamed of herself. But she wasn't.

She went up the stairs of Hobbema Studios hugging the memory of Raymond's hand as it waved her good-bye with a lighted cigarette between its fingers.

One has no patience with her.

CHAPTER XIX

I

MENDOZA went South to escape from two things not easy to evade—a love without hope and the shadow of old age.

Another man would have thought shame to retreat without at least putting his fortune to the proof. Not Mendoza.

By reason of his long and patient study, the faces of men and women had become to this Spaniard books, clear printed and of limpid diction, wherein he read the secrets of hearts. Here was his life's business, and to its service he had brought an intelligence and a natural aptitude very far from common. A formidable psychologist was Mendoza, hard to deceive where deception was intended. Where the very thought of the need for deception was not present, how was he to be led astray?

Ottilie loved Raymond Adkin. She didn't know it. But Mendoza knew it.

He marked the love-dawn in her eyes. For his ear, her lips spoke more than the name of Raymond. Her smile caressed it. Her voice made it holy. The recesses of her being were charged with an unconscious worship.

Another man, had he been capable of learning so much, would have set himself hardily to the task of preventing a miraculous fruition. Not Mendoza. Not, I say, Mendoza. That he could not have done it, who shall say? That he had not good cause for hope, no one will deny. She liked him well; she admired him exorbitantly as an artist; he had on his side wealth, power, fame and above all, experience. Had he chosen to put forth all his strength—but he did not so choose. It's foolishness to speculate on what might have been. He did not so choose. Why? Because, I imagine, he was Mendoza. A strange character, his: apt to react in an unusual fashion to the most usual stimuli. Incapable, it would seem, of even attempting, for his own quite legitimate purposes, to destroy the adorable marvel of a first love in the heart of a girl; incapable of deceiving himself into the belief that the act was to be in any wise defended. He saw very clear, did Mendoza. Not his money, not his position, not his own strong love, he knew, might make up to this girl for what, through him, she must lose.

He put himself aside.

But for the moment he had not the force to stay in London and see those two young things grow together. Not to be done. Not to be done. Needless torment. For his mind was quite at ease about their material welfare. They could do very well without him for a time. Let him, then, be gone as speedily as might be. Perhaps in Spain he would find balm for his heart.

The shadow, to, of Age had touched him. From

this, again, he fled, and where more naturally than to his own land?

Many a man has fancied that if he can only surround himself with the scenes of his boyhood, he will become something of a boy again, recapture a little of that which has gone from him. Mendoza's movement, when he obeyed the call of the sun and the hot skies of Andalusia, was instinctive. In England he had learned to feel old. In Spain he had been young. Spain, therefore, was the place for him. A faulty syllogism, but the logic of instinct is not always impeccable.

Had he argued the thing out with himself he must have known that he went a fool's errand. He didn't stop to argue it out. He wanted to be gone from this London, where Age had laid a hand on his elbow, where Love had whispered at his ear "Too late." Perhaps in Spain he might forget these dismal experiences. No other place, at least, could hold out any hope of it.

But to stay and look on—that was not required of him. That he might reasonably spare himself. And he would not—oh, no, he would not be missed. Far too busy they would be, looking into one another's eyes, ever to notice his absence. Or did they by chance become aware that he seemed no longer to be about, they would not regret it. Not seriously. Would they even wonder where he had gone? Probably not. Too busy listening to one another's whispers.

South, then, went Mendoza; South; there to tell himself, a moment, if he might, that Youth was

still to spend; to forget, if he could, a moment, that a girl and a boy were learning, in England, to love.

II

The bull-fight to you and me is a beastly institution; cruel in its practice and brutalising in its effect. To us a bull-ring is merely a sublimated slaughter-house, where fine beasts are tortured to death, in twenty minutes, theatrically, instead of being brained with a merciful pole-axe in half a second; where, in addition, sad, helpless old horses are gored and disembowelled by the dozen, and where a spangled acrobat very properly gets, occasionally, his deserts.

A Spaniard sees the bull-fight in another way than this.

To a Spaniard it is the one tremendous excitement of an otherwise sluggish existence. For the bull-fight he wakes up; while it continues he lives like a god; when it is over he relapses into lethargy. Strong wine stimulates, but it ends by stupefying a man. The bull-fight is not a deadener of the senses. Six bulls go to a corrida. Each bull takes some twenty minutes to kill. For a hundred and twenty minutes the glittering toreros play their fine game with Death down there on the yellow sand, and the killing of a man is a potentiality of every second. One does not go to sleep on stuff like that.

Here—if ever there was one—is a medicine for the dumps. If the Spaniard were less essentially melancholic, if he were less definitely convinced of the futility of life, if he brooded less upon his glori-

ous past, the bull-fight would disappear. But the sad need distraction and Spain is sad, sad to the core. The bull-fight makes her forget a moment. There all is said.

Mendoza went South in search of an anodyne. He thought he knew where to find it—in the Plaza de Toros. I don't apologise for him. He would not thank me. He went to Spain, I say, definitely to assist at as many bull-fights as should be going. And, sure enough, he forgot. While the play went on he thought of it and of it alone. Age and he had nothing to say to one another. He knew no more of love and the love-longing, than of jealousy, chagrin, disappointment, hate.

Until the last bull was dead.

And then?

Why, then the pain was back at his heart, to settle there and gnaw relentlessly until two days, three days later, the first bull of the subsequent corrida should come racing out on to the sand to meet its death.

He was very methodical. The first thing he did when he came into his own country was to map out a programme for himself and to this programme he adhered faithfully. He offered himself a debauch of bull-fights, as another man might have set out to drink himself into forgetfulness.

By no means every bull-fight is worth the attention of the serious amateur. Good bulls cost a lot of money, and the best toreros enjoy the salaries of great Opera singers. It is not on every Sunday that every municipality may offer to its public the spectacle of a first-rate corrida. The local Church

286 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

Festivals, however, call for something special in the way of sacrifice, and on such occasions the town's purse opens wide. Beasts and artists are engaged regardless of expense.

Spain is large and her railways are slow. The life, therefore, of a notable espada is far from being all danger and glory. During the season he and his assistants spend much the greater part of their time on the railway. Between one engagement and another they may have to cross the whole breadth of the land, speeding from bull-ring to station, sleeping all night on the train and arriving, jaded and dirty, just in time to dress and hasten off to their rendezvous with the public.

A man who proposes to see all the best corridas he can must therefore be prepared to travel far and to travel long. Mendoza was such a man. For his disease he had prescribed a certain medicine, and of that medicine none but of the first quality would serve. During the few weeks he was in Spain he travelled many hundreds of miles; but wherever he paused he saw bulls killed impeccably. While he sat in his bull-rings he was able to forget, Elsewhere he was not able to forget.

The treatment, in short, proved a complete failure.

Perhaps he had done unwisely to engrave, with so much care, a certain image on his memory.

III

At length, while he waited one sweltering night in Bobadilla Junction for the train that should

presently arrive to crawl with him down upon Malaga, he came suddenly to a knowledge of the idiocy of his proceedings.

"Luiz," he told himself, "you are a plain fool. This is the life of a hunted beast you are leading and to what end? Supposing you persist with this nonsense into October. Supposing, a month or two yet, you continue to drug yourself, now and then, for a few hours with these soul-stirring exhibitions. When October is gone there will be no more of them for you, my son. And what then, Luiz? What then? How will you do when November is upon you? Eh? Tell me that. How do you mean to get through the winter until Easter brings you a fresh supply of your chosen drug?

"A hunted beast, Luiz; that's what you are. And that which hunts you, you accommodate all the time on your own back. A pretty spectacle you make, my poor friend. A fit subject, in faith, for your own most humorous pencil.

"A coward too, my poor Luiz, you show yourself. You run away from pain. And all the time you carry it in your own coward's heart. Yes, a fool and a coward, that's what you are, and you may as well recognise it. You deserve all you are getting, all these miseries of night travel and day travel and crowding into packed hotels, and living on the husks that over-busy waiters throw into your trough. Yes, Luiz, a little plain speaking is what you need and you shall have it.

"*What if you are a little past your prime?*

Other men have been in the same case. And what if you love where love is not for you? Are you the only one to whom such a thing has occurred? I think not. Yet here you are, dragging yourself up and down Spain with a sick heart and a sicker head, gorging yourself on bull-fights in the hope of thus stifling your troubles. It is a delusion, my poor fellow. You will not do it in that way. A little more of it, and you will begin to go to pieces in earnest. A man does not encounter trouble with his heels. He takes it by the throat. And so shall you, brother. So shall you. Back with you to London. That is where you shall meet and conquer your pain. There only.

"It will hurt, Luiz," he went on. "It will hurt like the devil. You will see her, hear her voice. She will call you 'Dear Mendoza.' She will put her little hand on your arm and smile up into your eyes and talk to you about her Raymond. Yes, she will do all those things. And you shall smile back, with cold death in your heart; and then you shall go and busy yourself obediently to promote for her the welfare of her Raymond. And presently you shall stand by her side, you good old uncle, before some altar and listen, while she speaks the words that wed her to her Raymond. And then you shall see them drive away together. And then you shall be quite, quite happy. Oh, so very happy, my poor old Luiz, you shall be."

Suddenly he had a new—a disturbing thought. "Here I sit," he cried, "in Bobadilla, whining and cursing my fate. Here have I been this how many

days? chasing noted bull-fighters over the filthy railways of this furnace of a land. And all this time, what has been going on yonder? Have I ever given that a thought? Not once. Not once. Myself and my own sorrows, these have been my only preoccupations, God forgive me.

"Yet how do I know if things are as they should be with that precious little lady of mine?"

He said truth. Once satisfied by Otilie's assurances, that she was in no immediate need of money, he had hastened to Spain without a thought to spare for anything but his own griefs. And never, since his arrival, had he given the smallest consideration to anything else. Though the girl had been absent from his thoughts for but a few hours since last he had seen her, he had never considered her in any but the one way, as the source of his own trouble. That she might be having trouble of her own he had not hitherto reflected.

But now, his mind once set upon this track, he rapidly became oblivious to every other thought. She might be in difficulty. And with no one to look to but Adkin. He, Mendoza, had deserted her. That was how he looked upon his conduct now. He had deserted her. For the sake of his own peace of mind he had run away from what was his obvious duty, namely, to stand by and see that his Señorita came to no harm. What if it *had* wrung his heart to remain near her? What if Spain *had* promised him surcease from sorrow? What kind of a love was this that allowed a man to leave *his lady to get on as best she might when, at what-*

290 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

ever cost to himself, he might be near her to lend her aid, did she require it?

No longer, now, was he concerned to meet and throttle his own trouble. A wild anxiety possessed him to be back in London, where alone might he assure himself that all was well with his Señorita. He became the prey of dark forebodings. She was ill. She was persecuted. She was penniless. Fate, having broken her bank for her, would hardly be satisfied with that one blow. Other attentions Fate would assuredly have for her up its sleeve, to be produced as required. But what, what, what? And when, when, when?

Mendoza, by this time, was striding about like a madman up and down by the railway-track at Bobadilla.

London—he must be in London at once. Only there was it possible for him to set his mind at rest.

The train for Malaga came snorting and grinding into Bobadilla station. It went on without Mendoza.

Another four hours he had to wait for the North-bound express. He was into it before it had come to rest.

CHAPTER XX

I

LORD FROLING had gone down to his house in Hertfordshire in the last week of July. There he proposed to stay until the middle of October.

He left London well pleased. The three drawings which "young Atkins" had brought him had shown him that he had not gone wrong in giving the commission to this totally unknown boy. Remarkable work. Remarkable. Indeed, quite astonishing. Mendoza had known what he was doing when he had recommended this Atkins for the job. Lord Froling was very vastly obliged to Mendoza. If Atkins went on as he had begun he would produce something very greatly out of the way. Such a set of illustrations would not have been seen in England since Beardsley's *Morte d'Arthur*. For an Unknown two hundred and seventeen guineas for forty drawings, cover and end-paper was of course outrageous. He had Mendoza to thank for that, confound him! But in the end, it would prove cheap—that was to say, if Atkins kept it up and if Atkins was properly boomed.

That would mean further outlay. A show, that was *what was* indicated. Atkins had undertaken

to finish the work by the middle of December at latest. A show, then, should be arranged for January. Simultaneous publication of *The South Sea Bubble*. The show would advertise the book, the book the show. The Press could hardly fail to be enthusiastic about these drawings. The book, too, he rather flattered himself, would make its mark. For a historical story it was a pretty good historical story. And his adoption of a *nom de guerre* would help it. Naturally the secret was to be *de polichinelle*. Anyone who counted would know all about it. One's friends might be trusted to talk. To wrap up its authorship in a trifle of mystery never did a novel harm yet. The reviews would hint discreetly at the concealment of a distinguished personality. Reviewers welcomed anything that helped them with their half columns. You only needed to set a thing like that going to have the whole public agog to get hold of the book.

Concurrently Atkins's name would be in the mouths of the people who were interested in pictures. A few paragraphs about him (not forgetting the book) would have to be inspired. The illustrated weeklies would probably be glad to have some of his work to reproduce (not forgetting the book). And photographs. Mr. Raymond Atkins, the gifted young illustrator of *The South Sea Bubble*, the recently published novel, about whose authorship there is at present in Literary Circles so much speculation. That was the sort of thing. It would only need a little working. Atkins would be a made man in a month and the book would sell like hot cakes.

Atkins's work would be sought, and in a year or two the set of his *South Sea Bubble* originals would be worth not two hundred and seventeen guineas which, under his option, he, Froling, would have paid for them, but five hundred, six hundred—a thousand perhaps.

That was what Lord Froling called combining philanthropy with business.

The only regret he had was the knowledge that Punchester would profit—Punchester who, by this time, probably had drawersful of Atkins's stuff.

Well, well, it couldn't be helped. But there was this satisfaction in it. Punchester would have to give up exploiting Atkins several years before he, to-day, expected.

When he had been in the country a fortnight Lord Froling wrote to Raymond inviting him to bring for inspection any further illustrations he might have made. He inclosed a postal order for six shillings and sixpence, twopence over the third class return fare from Liverpool Street to Vicary St. John. Raymond carried four new pieces of the panorama down to Vicary St. John. Lord Froling was quite intelligent enough to perceive that Raymond was not troubling very much to illustrate his story, but at the same time he was so very sound a judge of black and white drawing that he crushed down all temptation to hamper his illustrator's choice of subjects. The merit of this young Atkins's pictures was so evident that, in Lord Froling's eyes, it far more than made up for their failure to bear in any direct fashion on the narrative. He ex-

pressed himself as fully satisfied, and forthwith began to speak of the show. This he did in order to stimulate the young Atkins to do his best.

"If," he said, "the rest of your work keeps up to the standard you have set yourself, Mr. Atkins, I propose, so soon as the illustrations are finished, to exhibit them, at my expense, in one of the West End Galleries. I presume that you will have no objection."

"Not I," said Raymond, who could hardly believe his ears. "Objection! I should think not."

"Such an exhibition," Lord Froling went on, "will not, I fear, bring you in any money, for since all that you show will be my property, you won't be able to count on selling anything off the wall. But I don't think that need trouble you. The advertisement you will get will be very valuable. This show will place you, establish you. We will get all the right people at the private view. I am not without influence among the critics, and I think I can promise you that your work will receive proper attention and a large publicity. I will stake my reputation as a connoisseur that these drawings will produce something of a stir. We shall publish *The South Sea Bubble* simultaneously. That, I believe, may not prove unhelpful to the show. The notices of the book will naturally mention the show; those of the show will naturally mention the book. We shall both wake up, Mr. Atkins, to find ourselves famous. Eh? Ha, ha!"

He paused, hungering, poor gentleman, for a few words of praise from Raymond. They didn't

come. So long as Lord Froling didn't ask him point blank what he thought of *The South Sea Bubble* Raymond was content to keep his opinion of that dreary *opus* to himself. He had no desire to wound the feelings of his patron, little though he liked him; especially now, right on top of the old bloke's offer of a show. Probably he couldn't help being a sharper where he saw the chance of getting a pair of Conders cheap. Collectors had to be collectors, one supposed. But evidently Froling had his decent side, after all. Frightfully decent of him, for instance, to want to give a show of the *South Sea Bubble* drawings. One couldn't help appreciating an offer like that. One didn't want to have to tell a man who made one such an offer that one thought his story the flattest kind of rot. Hardly.

"I think," he said, "that this is frightfully decent of you, Lord Froling."

"Not at all, Mr. Atkins, not at all. A pleasure, I assure you. A duty, too. I should think very poorly of myself if I failed to do everything in my power to bring your merits to the notice of the world. If my rather—er—amateur tale is the means—eh——?"

Again he gave Raymond his chance. Again Raymond was discreet.

"Well," he said, "I think it's perfectly noble of you. I was pretty keen on this job before, but now, lord! how I shall work." He got up. He wanted to tell the news to Smith. The first train back to London for him. "I'll leave these drawings with you to keep with the others," he said. "That's seven

you've got. I'll send you some more in a week or so. The cover'll probably be among them. I've got a pretty good idea for it. Good-bye, Lord Froling, and a hundred thousand thanks." He escaped, and ran all the way to the station; missed a train by three minutes and had to wait forty-nine for the next. He employed them in roughing out his cover in his sketch-book.

An adipose devil with horns, hoof and tail, wearing the costume of the early part of the eighteenth century squatted on a pile of money bags and blew from an inverted churchwarden pipe a vast soap-bubble. Over the surface of this bubble crawled and scrambled a multitude of odd little people clutching with eager hands at nothing whatever.

The sketch was finished just before the train came in.

II

When Raymond told her what was in the wind Otilie very nearly forgave her uncle. The impulse to do so quickly passed.

"No," she thought, "there's no kindness whatever in this. It's Raymond's drawings that have done it. That man realises that they're wonderful and that they're bound to attract notice to his paltry old book. And so he's going to make a big fuss about them. He only means to have this show because it'll advertise his story. That's all. He'd see Raymond starving in the gutter before he'd give him a show, if he didn't believe that the show would help the book."

She did not express herself in this way to Raymond. The young man was now inclined to be enthusiastic about her uncle. Let him remain so by all means. Such enthusiasm was a valuable asset. It promoted good work. She was content to rejoice in Raymond's luck, and when he spoke of his gratitude to the peer she said how pleased Mendoza would be.

Raymond was a good deal happier about his friend, now that he knew she was taking her malt and cod-liver oil regularly. She was still a bit thin in the cheeks, but her colour was ever so much better. He often remarked upon it. These compliments to her skill with rouge and a hare's foot, sounded sweetly in Otilie's ears. So long as Raymond didn't worry about her he would be able to give all his mind to his work.

The Nursery was finished and her second drawing was well begun. It was to be called *The Accompanist* and was to exhibit a magnificent virtuoso pounding a piano to a roomful of splendid women, each of whom shouted furiously into her neighbour's ear. Otilie had great hopes of it.

She was beginning also to grow accustomed to semi-starvation. So long as she didn't exert herself too much, it didn't matter if she felt a little weak now and then. She managed to keep her studio tidy, and each evening she was quite able to stroll with Raymond as far as a bench on the Embankment. The cool air by the river was pleasant, and they had many good hours together. *Battersea Park she found too far for her; and it was out of*

the question to go for long walks as he wanted her to do. She had therefore invented a soft corn between two of her toes, and had schooled herself to limp a little whenever Raymond was with her. No one can be expected to walk very far with a soft corn; and they are stubborn things, slow to yield to treatment.

Raymond was working steadily and well. So was she. They saw nothing of one another by day, but each evening Raymond arrived to show her what he had done and to see what she had done, draw his money and take her out for an airing. The weather continued so hot that indoors was quite the best place during the day, for people at any rate who had work to do and couldn't afford the time or the money to go jaunting up the river. It was a methodical existence they led. Had there been a little more solid food in it for Otilie she would have enjoyed every minute of it. She was convinced that she was going to beat Punchester and the pawnbrokers, and Raymond was working like a man inspired. The amount he was producing seemed, when its quality was considered, incredible. But there was no refusing the evidence of her eyes. Pencil one day; ink the next—that was Raymond's programme; and he never failed to carry it out. It seemed as if these elaborate and beautiful designs must create themselves. She could find in the pencil-drawings hardly a sign of erasure. The lines were put down with almost as much certainty as if he had traced them; but no tracing ever exhibited their freedom and wit.

"He must see the whole thing," she said to herself, "actually see it, precisely as it is to be, before ever he takes up a pencil; and then he must simply reproduce it, as a camera might." And she thought of her own laborious method of constructing a picture and acquired a kind of awe for this preposterous, simple-hearted, ungainly great boy who breathed on to paper these busy living crowds wherein no individual ever seemed to be the repetition of another, whether in features, character, clothing or posture. It was as if he had never heard the blessed word "formula."

III

Raymond was packing up four drawings to send to Lord Froling as he had promised, when a letter arrived from his patron, enclosing a second postal order and desiring him to bring what he had done to Vicary St. John on the following day. Mr. Atkins would oblige Lord Froling by *not* posting his illustrations.

Don't imagine that Lord Froling hungered for Raymond's society. He valued Raymond's work too highly to feel quite comfortable about exposing it to the hazards of the mail. That's all. The compliment of his invitation was addressed to the genius, not to the personal charm, of Raymond, who was bidden to Vicary St. John simply as a light porter.

Raymond grumbled at the waste of time this journey would occasion, but not seriously. He was

very much more amiably disposed towards his patron than he had been, and had quite come round to Otilie's view of that Brighton story. It is difficult to believe that an old gentleman who is going to give you your chance is a scoundrel. A liar, perhaps, yes, but not a swindler. I need hardly say that it had never occurred to Raymond to suspect that Lord Froling, in this matter of the show, was being anything but generous.

So, though he grumbled, he went with his drawings done up in brown-paper and attached by their string to his buttonhole, according to his commendable practice when carrying his wares about the world. He rather valued himself on this invention, which made it impossible for him any longer to leave his things on the seats of railway carriages and omnibuses.

And as he went he received (about twenty minutes out of Liverpool Street) an inspiration to the effect that it would be rather splendid if Lord Froling (that great-hearted man) could be induced to take an interest in the work of Smith. Why not? Smith would be in the way of selling her stuff so soon as *The Useless* should have published her first drawing. Lord Froling was a collector and a person who had hold of the ear of the dealers and the art editors and a thoroughly helpful fellow into the bargain. Smith's work was simply stunning. From such premises there was, for Raymond, only one conclusion to be drawn.

A man has to be a very hardened kind of wicked imbecile to meditate such deeds, let alone do them.

To force a rival upon the attention of a patron is fairly to fling its gifts back in the face of Providence. If Raymond had forthwith seen Otilie supplant him in the favour of Lord Froling, it would have been only what he deserved.

He arrived, exhibited his four drawings, heard them commended and accepted, saw Lord Froling put them to join their companions in his big roll-top desk, and immediately opened the subject with which for the past hour he had been bursting.

"Lord Froling," he said, "you've been so jolly good to me, that I've been wondering whether you'd mind, next time I come, if I bring some of the work of a girl I know for you to look at. I think it would interest you. It's just about as good as it can be. Punchester thinks so. He's putting her on *The Useless*, at any rate."

"Ah!" said Lord Froling, "I seem to remember. Didn't I meet her at Punchester's last At Home? A rather small and rather smart young lady. Somewhat brusque in her manner, wasn't she? If I recollect. Didn't Punchester tell me she was a Socialist, or was it I that told Punchester she must be one. My memory about her is a little vague, I'm afraid; but I don't seem to have a very agreeable impression." He had, indeed, never given another thought to the matter.

Raymond stiffened. "You must be thinking of someone else," he said.

"I daresay. I daresay," said Lord Froling. "One meets so many young ladies. But I certainly thought—I feel pretty sure. However, well?"

"She signs her work 'Otilie,'" said Raymond, "but her full name is Otilie Wigmore!"

"What?" Lord Froling sat up abruptly and went a little white.

"Otilie Wigmore."

"Good God!" said Lord Froling and went a little red.

"What on earth's the matter?" Raymond asked.

Lord Froling's agitation increased. "Who is this girl?" he harshly inquired. "Where does she come from?"

"I don't know," said Raymond staring, "that she comes from anywhere in particular. The last place she lived in was Brighton, I believe. But her people were rather nomads. Always moving. Her father was a painter, Reginald Wigmore. Not much good, I fancy. He wrote a pretty good book, though, on the Early English Watercolour men. You may have seen it."

Lord Froling got up. "You can tell this girl from me," he said loudly, "that it's no go. Do you understand. No go!"

Raymond got up also. "No," he said, "I don't understand, and I shall certainly take no such message to her. I don't recollect that I brought you any from her. Miss Wigmore isn't the sort of girl to presume like that on a chance meeting at Punchester's. I spoke to you about her on my own account entirely."

"You mean to tell me," Lord Froling demanded, "that my niece didn't——?"

"Your niece?" said Raymond.

"Oh, come, Mr. Atkins. Don't ask me to believe that you didn't know it."

For a moment or two Raymond stood very still, obviously thinking hard.

"Her mother," he asked at length, "was your sister, eh?"

"We will not go any further into this, Mr. Atkins. The matter is to me painful in the extreme."

"'Head of the clan,' " said Raymond, thinking aloud, "'and her only brother.' Yes, that's what she said."

"Mr. Atkins——"

"I see," said Raymond slowly, "you're that uncle of hers. You're the fellow who kept her mother away when— But why in thunder didn't she tell me?" he demanded.

"Come, come, Mr. Atkins," said Lord Froling. "This is hardly a matter in which you need to concern yourself. Nor do I quite see what title you have to do so. I'm willing to acquit you of all complicity in this attempt to——"

"Complicity be damned!" said Raymond. "And you too. Here! Give me back my drawings. I'm not going to work for a man like you."

Lord Froling, profoundly disturbed, sat down, "Mr. Atkins——" he began mildly.

"If you care to know," said Raymond, between his teeth, "my name's Adkin. Perhaps you'll have the goodness to address me by it for once. This'll be the last opportunity you'll have, by God! Give me my drawings. I want to be out of this. Why *on earth* didn't she tell me, though?"

Lord Froling laughed unpleasantly. "My niece," he said, "has a very devoted champion. She is to be congratulated. But you're behaving like a fool, my boy, all the same. Do you seriously mean to say that you propose to throw up this commission because your little friend chooses to imagine that her mother was badly treated by her family?"

"Yes," said Raymond, "I do. My drawings if you please."

"It would seem," said Lord Froling, rubbing his nose, "it would seem that you're very much in love with her."

Raymond glared at him. "In love with her?" he cried. "What do you mean in love with her?"

"Young gentlemen," said Lord Froling with a little shrug, "aren't as a rule so ready to wreck their careers by assuming the quarrels of young ladies in whom they do *not* take a certain tender interest."

"Of course I'm in love with her," said Raymond. "Obviously. Good God!"

The glare went out of his eyes. They remained fixed on Lord Froling, but with no more interest in them than they might have shown if that person had been a piece of his own furniture.

"Good God!" said Raymond again. He was evidently quite unconscious of his surroundings. "Little Smith," he murmured with a vacant smile. "Little Smith. Well, I'm damned! I must have been drunk all this time. I'd better see her about this at once."

He came to himself with a start, met Lord Frol-

ing's eye, coloured suddenly, frowned and said harshly: "May I ask you once more for my drawings?"

"I suppose," said Lord Froling, "that you are quite prepared to pay me back the money I've advanced to you? Twenty-five pounds, I think."

Raymond made an impatient gesture. "Of course," he said. "Naturally. My drawings, please."

"My money, please," said Lord Froling.

"I haven't got it on me, if that's what you mean. But I'll raise it somehow. They'll give me eight or ten quid back on that magnolia and Smith's got most of the rest. Then I can put Kuan Yin away again, and I daresay old Sikes'll let me have a bit. If you can wait a day or two——"

"Certainly," said Lord Froling, "if you can wait so long for your drawings."

"You mean you won't part with them till I bring that money?"

Lord Froling locked his desk and put the key in his pocket.

"I don't know that I mean that," he said. "I may prefer not to part with them at all. Under our contract they are mine to use as I think fit. I am not in the least bound to give them back to you, even if you bring me twenty-five pounds. Moreover, I needn't pay you another penny for them until you have completed your part of the bargain."

Raymond looked at him darkly. "Is that the law?" he asked.

Lord Froling didn't know whether it was or not,

nor did he care. What he wanted, what he must have, was young Atkins's set of illustrations for *The South Sea Bubble*. It is a mistake for gentlemen who suffer from Pride of Family to write novels. For this they deliver themselves into the hands of Vanity of Authorship.

"Oh!" he said pleasantly, "don't let us talk about the law. We're not going to law. You are going to be a sensible fellow. That will be much better. To-morrow you'll look at all this quite differently, I hope. I may tell you that I think none the worse of you for what you've just been saying to me. From a boy of your years to a man of mine it was not very becoming; but I make allowances. You are evidently something of a Quixote and you think yourself bound to be angry with me because my niece has a grudge against her mother's family. But take my advice, my young friend, and give up these chivalrous ideas. You will find them get sadly in your way. And understand me. I am quite willing to overlook this ebullition. My offer of a show stands. When you have come to your senses and decided that it is wiser to carry out this commission, as you have agreed to do, and so arrive rapidly at the success which I wish for you with all my heart, than to win a soft look from your sweetheart's pretty eyes and a kiss from her——"

Raymond struck his hand on the table. "That'll do," he said. "I'm not so very keen on success—not at the price you propose. When I have the money I'll come back for the drawings. You shall

at least have an opportunity of doing the square thing by me."

He bounced out of the room and out of the house.

"Damnation!" said Lord Froling. For the first time in twenty years he regretted his treatment of his sister Otilie.

CHAPTER XXI

I

OTILIE was wakened out of a heavy sleep by a thunder on her door. She had worked all morning, drunk her insufficient lunch and then, feeling suddenly rather more tired than usual, had sat down in her armchair and closed her eyes. They had been aching a little recently. She had not slept much during the previous night. A bit of a snooze would do her no harm.

Startled now, she lay for a moment with her heart thumping and gazed round her stupidly. Never before in this room had she slept anywhere but in her bed. She was accustomed to seeing the window when she woke, and now her back was to it. She had some difficulty in realising where she was.

The knocking on her door continued. She glanced at her wrist-watch and saw that it was past three o'clock. She got up shakily. Her head swam. She steadied herself against the table, trailed her feet across the room and opened to Raymond.

"Smith," he cried, "why on earth didn't you tell me that old villain Froling was your uncle?"

Every young man who goes to see a girl with the intention of telling her that he loves her considers, more or less craftily, how he is to do it. A thing like that, he tells himself, requires a little preparation. A man can't rush at a thing like that without so much as a Good Morning or a How are You? It isn't done. You've got to lead up gradually to a thing like that. But how?

Nobody ever discovers how, for the only certainty of this matter is that the business gets itself done quite otherwise than it has been planned.

Raymond had his scheme. It was not very elaborate.

He proposed to tell Otilie that he had given up Lord Froling's commission. She would ask him why he had done so. He would reply that it was because he had found out that Lord Froling was the uncle who had treated her mother so rottenly. She would then ask him why he should give up the commission because her uncle had treated her mother rottenly. He would then say that he refused to work for a man who had rottenly treated the mother of the girl he loved.

And there you were!

A very sound workable scheme, he rather thought.

It is a pity that he should have bungled it at the outset. But then, it is a pity that such schemes should always be bungled at the outset. In carefully rehearsing his interview Raymond only did what we all do. In beginning it the wrong way round he only did what none of us succeed in avoid-

310 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

ing. There is, I suppose, a Law of Nature somewhere which governs these things.

Ottillie passed a hand across her eyes and stood blinking at him. "I was asleep," she said. "I—I—but come in. What did you say? Why didn't I what?"

She fancied that he had asked her why Lord Froling was her uncle? But he couldn't have done that. He didn't know that Lord Froling was her uncle. She had been particularly careful not to tell him, because it was important that he shouldn't know. Why was it important? She would remember in a moment. She stood aside. "Come in," she said wearily and swayed against the door.

Raymond strode past her to the fireplace and turned. "Why didn't you tell me," he demanded again, "that Froling's your uncle?" He knew he had gone wrong, somehow, but he couldn't, at the moment think of anything else to say.

She closed the door and sat down on the table, the nearest support. A profound depression invaded her. So he had discovered it after all. Her concealment had been useless. Raymond was up in arms against his patron. The very thing she had sought to avoid had happened. This was going to play the mischief with Raymond's work. It had been so important—yes, she remembered now—that he should be glad to work for her uncle. And recently he had been. Quite an affection he had been developing for her uncle. That was what she had wanted. But however had Raymond dis-

covered? How could he possibly have discovered? She had been so particularly careful——

"Well?" he inquired. He didn't see that he could be said to have led up to it yet. But he would manage it presently.

"But however did you find out?" she asked. "I never told you. I've been particularly careful——"

"Froling told me himself," said Raymond. "You see——"

She gaped at him. "*He* did?" she said. "*He* told you he was my uncle. Why should he? He couldn't. I doubt if he even knows of my existence."

"Well, he did. I—I spoke of you to him. I—I wanted to interest him in your work, you see. But look here, never mind that, what I want to tell you is that I've——"

Ottilie gave way to sudden laughter, weak and hysterical.

"Oh!" she cried, "but how funny! Oh, but how very funny! You wanted to interest *him* in *my* work. A Froling! Oh, Raymond, you're absolutely priceless." She pulled out her handkerchief and began to wipe tears away.

"Well," he said, "how was I to know that he was the uncle you hate so? If you'd only told me—and why didn't you?"

"Why?" she echoed. "Yes, why didn't I? Oh, I know. I wanted you to like him. I thought you'd work better for him if you liked him. You didn't like him at first, you know. I didn't want to set you against him more than could be helped. *I thought—I felt——*"

"You thought I wouldn't work for him at all if I knew how he's treated your mother. Was that it?" He thought he saw his way now.

"Oh, no. Not that, of course. What I was going to say was only that I felt it might be better to keep quiet about his being my uncle. I did so want you to like him, and do your best work on this book of his. But I'm sorry I did it now. You've just got to forgive me for being so sly. Don't be angry with me, Raymond. I meant well. I did really. It was only for you I did it, Raymond. I did so want—" She wearied of saying words.

There followed a short silence. At last Raymond said: "Look here, Smith, I'm quite sure you thought you were doing the kind and the right thing by me. You couldn't mean to do anything else. But I do wish you'd told me. Because naturally now I can't go on with this commission of Froling's."

"Raymond!" she wailed.

He held up a hand for silence. "I hate him like sin," he went on, "for the way he treated your mother. If he wasn't an old man I'd like to give him the best thrashing he ever had. I can't do that, but I can refuse to work for him."

"But you won't, Raymond," she pleaded, clasping her hands together and leaning far towards him. "You won't do that. I think it would just about kill me."

"I have done it," he said triumphantly. "And why? Because——"

"Oh God!" she cried wildly and collapsed face downwards on the table.

"Hell!" said Raymond and jumped to her side. "Here, brace up, Smith!" He caught her round the shoulders and raised her so that she lay, heavy and limp, against his chest. Her face was white; her eyes were rolled far up; her jaw had fallen. He had never seen a girl in a faint before and he thought she was dead. He stared at her aghast. "Smith, Smith," he whispered, "for God's sake, Smith. Smith, darling. Don't look like that. Speak to me, sweetheart. Say something. Anything."

Ottilie said nothing.

He glared wildly round the room, saw the door. Beyond it there were people who might help him. But could he leave her? He must. He couldn't. The poor devil was distracted. Ha! there was a step outside. It paused.

"Help!" Raymond shouted, "I say, you outside there. Help!"

He laid Ottilie on the table and rushed to the door; flung it open and found himself face to face with Mendoza.

"Thank God!" he cried. "I say, Smith's dying. What am I to do?"

II

Mendoza said no word. He gave an inarticulate cry and darted into the studio. He caught Ottilie up and gazed into her face for a moment. Then; "She's fainted," he said sharply. "Get me some water. Quick, damn you!"

314 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

He lowered her to the floor and, while Raymond sprang to the tap, seated her and pushed her head gently down towards her knees. The effect was good. Otilie came out of her swoon before Raymond had got back with the water. She sat up with a silly smile on her mouth and found Mendoza's face peering anxiously into hers.

"Hello, Mendoza," she said. "How nice! Have I been making a fool of myself?" She leant back comfortably against the Spaniard's knee, gave a little sigh and fainted again.

Mendoza patiently repeated his treatment. It succeeded as before and this time definitely. Otilie decided to remain in command of herself. She drank a little of the water that Raymond held to her lips, sat up again, brushed away a lock that had fallen over her eyes and said: "I'm all right now, really. Let me get up, please."

Mendoza lifted her in his arms and put her on her couch. "There!" he said. "Lie you there, please, and do not move."

She became aware of Raymond hovering, with blanched cheeks and terrified eyes in the background. She gave him a brave little smile, and a weak little wave of her hand. "Cheer up, Raymond," she said. "It's all right. Don't you worry. Tell him it's all right, Mendoza."

"Of course it is all right," said Mendoza, "and now I am going to make you a cup of tea."

"Tea?" she said. "No, I don't want any tea."

"Well," said Mendoza, "you are going to have some whether you want it or not. Where do you

keep it?" He had opened one cupboard and found it full of clothing, and was now rummaging in the other.

"No," she said, "really—please don't trouble. What I really want, I think, is to be alone for a little. Just a little lie down. I'll be perfectly well if I can have a bit of sleep. Why don't you and Raymond go out for half an hour and then come back for me. We might go somewhere for tea, if you insist. I don't think I've got any here just now. I'm sorry."

He glanced at her suspiciously. The thinness of her face and hands had not escaped his notice. Nor had the entire absence of any sort of provisions from her cupboard. He thought: "There's some infernal mystery here."

"All right," he said. "Adkin and I will leave you alone for a bit. We'll bring some tea and things back with us. You are not to go out of here this afternoon."

He let the blind down, and went into the kitchenette. Here he found a face-rag drying on a string. He steeped it in cold water, wrung it out and folded it. Then he laid it across Ottilie's forehead, put the glass of water and her hand-bag beside her on a chair, gave her a piece of Bristol board from the table with which to fan herself, and spread over her feet the rug that covered her trunk. Finally he laid hold of Raymond's arm.

"Come on, Adkin," he said. "We are only in the way here at present. Give me your door-key, Señorita. No need for you to be getting up to let us in."

She took the key out of her bag and handed it to him. "Dear Mendoza," she said and pressed his fingers. "How good you are to me! And how good it is to have you back!" She motioned with her head for him to stoop down. "Don't let Raymond worry about me," she whispered. "Tell him I'm all right, really. Please, please don't let Raymond worry."

He looked steadily into her eyes for a moment. A faint colour crept into her cheeks. She glanced downwards and again, very softly, pressed his fingers.

For Mendoza all was said.

He dropped her hand and straightened his body. "You lie still," he said. "We will be back soon. Then—tea for you, Señorita."

He followed Raymond out of the room.

III

"Now," he said, as they descended the stairs together, "tell me what happened. What made her faint like that? Her table shows that she has been working. Has she been going at it too hard in this heat? And why is there nothing to eat anywhere in the place?"

"Nothing to eat?" Raymond cried. "There must be."

"There is not. No tea, no bread, no butter, no biscuits. Nothing. Only a little jug of milk."

"She must have just happened to be out of things," said Raymond.

"Well," said Mendoza, "it looks to me more as if she has been hard up. Has she?"

"Hard up?" said Raymond. "Not likely, with two hundred a year of her own."

"Ah!" said Mendoza.

"The fact is," said Raymond, "she oughtn't to have stayed on in Chelsea. I've been at her again and again to go away somewhere by the sea. She's not been looking a bit well, and she'd no business to stick at it as she has done. I kept telling her that she ought to go away, but she wouldn't. Perhaps it is my fault, though, because I believe she stayed here largely to look after my money for me. Bless her sweet face! You know she keeps it in her trunk. At any rate she simply wouldn't go, and after a time I gave up trying to make her, because it seemed to worry her. But if she's gone and made herself ill on my account, I shall simply hang myself, Mendoza. When I saw her there just now in that awful faint I swear I thought she was dying and I nearly went crazy with terror. If you hadn't turned up, I don't know what I'd have done. It's a frightful thing, old man, to believe that the girl you love is dying in your arms."

Mendoza smiled. "So," he said, "you have found that out then, have you?"

"Found it out!" Raymond echoed. "Why, yes, that's exactly what I have done, and only this very day too. But I've been in love with her from the first time I saw her in Punchester's room. But now, talk about revelations! Why it's changed the whole damned world for me, if only she's all

right. You do think, she'll be all right now, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Mendoza reassuringly. "She will be all right now. I expect she has been overdoing it a bit with her work. She will have to give herself a holiday, that's all. But tell me, Adkin, what happened exactly to make her faint? What had you and she been talking about—if you do not mind telling me."

"Well," said Raymond, "I'm afraid I am to blame there, perhaps. You see I've only found out to-day that Froling is her uncle—the chap you know, who treated her mother so rottenly. You remember her telling us in the Café Royal that day. Yes? Well, I hope you won't think me damnably ungrateful to you, old man, but I simply can't go on working for a person like that. It turns my stomach even to think of him. It isn't that I won't. I can't. It's taken all the life out of me so far as those illustrations go. I could no more do another drawing for Froling than I could rob a blind woman of the pennies in her tin cup. Well, it was just as I was telling her this that that poor darling girl keeled over. It evidently upset her frightfully. But why? Why? Why should she want me to do drawings for her stinking old uncle? She must hate him worse than I do. Of course I know she was anxious for me to do this commission, because it was going to be a pretty good thing for me. That's why she never told me that he was her uncle. She says she didn't want to put me off him any more than I was already, so that I should give the very best of

myself to the job. She says she wanted me to like him. Like him!"

They emerged into King's Road. Mendoza shepherded Raymond to the right, that is to say in the direction of the nearest grocer's shop.

"I see," he said, "so she fainted when you told her that you are going to give up this commission?"

"No. When I told her I *had* given it up. I had a splendid row with old Froling this very day. I told him exactly what I thought of him."

Mendoza grinned in spite of himself.

"What did he say to that?" he asked.

"Say? He said that I would think better of it tomorrow and that he was quite willing to go on and that his offer of the show stood. Can you beat that? He must want those drawings pretty badly, eh?"

"One moment. What show?"

"That's what puzzles me, Mendoza. I can't understand why a man like Froling, who can treat a woman as he treated my darling Smith's mother, should appear to be in some ways such a quite decent old merchant. He's treated me well enough, damn him! He gave me my price at once, as you saw, and he's offered now to pay for a show of these illustrations of mine. I call that pretty generous. Why the devil should he pay for a show for me? He hardly knows me. But of course that's all off now. It's a pity, but it can't be helped. I shall have to pay him back that twenty-five quid he advanced me. I expect I can manage it in time somehow. If he sticks to my drawings he must, I suppose; but I won't have his money. I do hope you

320 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

won't think me a hound, Mendoza. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for what you've done for me. But it's just rotten bad luck that you should have pitched on Froling, and there it is."

Mendoza was silent.

That Adkin was a fool was evident. A most conspicuous fool was Adkin. Yet for his folly the Spaniard could not do otherwise than love him. Here was a boy without a rap, perpetually on the edge of starvation, who threw his whole future away like so much dirt rather than be beholden for a sixpence to the enemy of his friend. Now such folly happened to be, in Mendoza's sight, better than most wisdom; for he happened to be that kind of a fool himself.

He turned admiring eyes upon the big, clumsy creature that slouched along by his side with his hands in his pockets and his head sunk despondently on his chest, and he sought diligently among his active wits for the word which should yet save the situation. That it was not hopeless was clear. If, in the face of Adkin's conduct, Froling had stuck to his offer of a show, it could only mean that he was mad for these illustrations. They must, then, be prodigious. Froling knew it. Froling, the collector, would not let Froling, the lord, nourish resentment. So far as Froling went a reconciliation was possible.

But Adkin? What was the cure for Adkin's lunacy? An appeal to his self-interest? Useless. But mightn't it be satisfactory to know that it was useless.

He laid hold of Raymond's jacket and halted him. They had arrived at the grocer's shop where he proposed to buy his provisions.

"This show," he said softly, "it would be the making of you, Adkin."

Raymond snorted. "Very likely," he said, "but I don't care about being made that way."

Mendoza nodded and sought further. Presently he said; "I thought you were in love, for instance."

Raymond's eyes took on a wild look. "It's no good," he cried. "I can't work for Froling."

Mendoza put a gentle hand on his arm. "And our little Señorita," he asked. "Can't you work for her?"

"She doesn't need anyone to work for her," said Raymond staring. "She's quite comfortably off. She's got— Good God!" he cried.

"What's the matter now?"

"I never thought of that," said Raymond. "Good God! And I was going to ask her to marry me. God!" he went on speaking his thoughts as they surged uppermost. "What an escape! Suppose I'd done it, and me a pauper. Oh! why the devil has she to have all that money? No, the Lord be praised for that. She's all right. But I shall have to work like thunder now. Oh! why the devil had it to be Froling? If it had only been someone else. This commission. Four hundred quid. And that show——"

He fell silent and stood with his face working. Mendoza waited.

"No," said Raymond at last. "Not for Froling. I'll just have to wait a bit. Punchester——"

"Let me tell you something," said Mendoza.

"Well?"

"The Señorita has not got a cent beyond what she can make. All her money was in Ardle's bank."

"What!" An immense joy leapt into Raymond's face. "Then——" The joy died away as suddenly as it had come. "But," he cried, "that's perfectly damnable, you know. What'll she do, poor darling? She can't—She isn't—Mendoza,"—he caught hold of the Spaniard's shoulders—"do you think she has been hard up all this time? Is it that that's made her— But there was my money, you know. There was any God's quantity of my money in the trunk. In the trunk, Mendoza."

"Was there?" said the Spaniard, "I daresay. But that is not the point. The point is that she has not a cent. The point is that she may perhaps need someone to work for her. But that says nothing to you, does it? I'll get your answer in a moment."

Thereupon he darted suddenly into the grocer's shop.

He came out five minutes later with a parcel in his hand. It contained a package of tea, a pound of rusks, a pound of sugar, and a bottle of honey. He rejoined Raymond, who was standing with his eyes fixed earnestly upon a gravel-bin. Mendoza gave the boy a jog.

"Now," he said cheerfully, "we want some milk. And then we shall want buns for you and me. And then we can go back and tell the Señorita that you

do not care enough about her to work for Froling, eh?"

"By God!" said Raymond with a gasp, "I'd work for Satan himself if it would do her any good."

"Oh," said Mendoza with a laugh, "let us hope it will not come to that. Now," he went on quickly "while I get that milk, do you take this bundle back and start the kettle. Here is the key. Make sure she is awake before you go in. We do not want to give her any more shocks just now."

He hurried off along the King's Road.

IV

"Now," Raymond was thinking as, a minute or two later, he began to climb the staircase of Hobbema Studios. "I must do nothing to excite her. I'll just tell her to lie still while I boil the kettle. No talking. No arguing. Nothing about that damned bank. Nothing about her having been hard up. Nothing about my money in the trunk. We can go into all that when she's fitter. And nothing about this commission business, unless just to tell her that I mean to take it on again if Froling wants me to. That'll please her, I think. That won't do her any harm. Frightfully keen on that commission for me, and the show too, she is. God bless her. And, whatever I do, nothing about my being in love with her. Not now. That'll have to keep a bit, too, till she's fitter. It would be absolutely rotten of me to bother her about that now, poor darling. Be-

324 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

sides, who am I to be asking any girl to marry me? A damned pauper like me. Wait till I've begun to earn a bit. Wait until I've squared things up with that cursed Froling. Wait until that show's come off. Wait till that rotten book's published. Besides, she probably doesn't think of me that way at all. I'm just a pal to her. Just a pal."

Here he reached Ottilie's door. He paused before knocking and listened. Not a sound. Was she asleep? A sudden dread came upon him. Had she fainted again, and this time with no one near her? He held his breath and listened, listened. A bumble-bee, lost in Hobbema Studios, droned past his head and went bump against the window of the staircase. Otherwise the whole great building was sunk in a hot and dusty silence. It was horrible. His heart began to beat violently. He listened again at the door. Not a sound. Why was she so still in there? She might be dead for all the movement she made. His heart stopped. He nerved himself and rapped cautiously.

At once Ottilie's voice bade him enter.

A huge sigh of relief burst from him; he put the key in the lock and entered the darkened room.

Ottilie lay on the couch where they had left her. She looked very small and white. Her eyes were wide open and they seemed enormous. She raised one hand and waved it in welcome. "Perfectly well again," she cried. "Come and put the kettle on. Where's Mendoza?"

Raymond shut the door, took two steps and fell on his knees beside her. "Smith," he said brokenly.

MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY 325

"Dear, dear little Smith. Did you know I love you?"

She touched his cheek with the back of a finger and smiled into his eyes.

The kettle had not yet been put on to boil when Mendoza knocked on the door.

V

"It's all right," said Raymond, solemnly, "we're engaged."

Mendoza entered and put down a bag of buns and a bottle of milk on the table. He glanced at Otilie sideways and saw in her face what he wanted to see.

He put out one hand to her and the other to Raymond and gave them each a squeeze. "In a moment," he said, with his eyes on the unopened parcel of groceries, "we shall drink some big cups of tea to this. Yes?"

"My goodness!" cried Raymond. He dropped Mendoza's hand, and dashed into the kitchenette.

Mendoza laughed gaily. "Ah, Señorita," he said, "you have courage to undertake that fellow. But for this I don't blame him. Oblige me by drinking some of my nice milk."

She closed her eyes. "Must I?" she asked. "What's in the bag?"

"Buns," he said as he opened his bottle and went to the cupboard for a tumbler.

"Oh," she sighed, "give me a bun. I don't think I want any milk, Mendoza."

326 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"You do not like it?" he asked, surprised.

"I loathe it," she whispered. "Oh! how I loathe it."

He came over to her, drew a chair to her side and sat down. "Tell me," he said, "what have you been doing with yourself? Do you think I would have gone away if you had not told me you had plenty of money?"

The return of Mendoza had taken all the fight out of Ottilie. "It was stolen," she said, "while I was out."

He frowned. "But Adkin," he asked? "He had plenty. And you were keeping it safe for him."

"Ah!" she said, "but he'd spent half of it on a jade for you."

"For me? Half of it? A jade? That boy's a fool!" Mendoza spoke fiercely, but his eyes were soft.

"He was so grateful to you," she pleaded. "I ought to have stopped him; but I couldn't. You see, *I* was grateful to you too."

Mendoza turned his head away and began to undo the parcel of groceries.

"He didn't know about the bank," she went on. "He never guessed that I was so hard up. He thought it was the heat that was making me thin. He——"

In a few more sentences she had told him everything. "That's why I loathe milk," she concluded. "Please, please don't make me drink any to-day, Mendoza. Mayn't I have a bun?"

"No," he said. "I have here something better for

you than buns." He held up a rusk, dipped it in the honey, then in the milk, and put it between her eager lips. "And now," he said rising, "for tea. But first—" He pushed back his chair and dropped on one knee, bowed low, and swept his right hand from his forehead to the floor.

"Salut!" he whispered.

CHAPTER XXII

I

HERE this story ought to end. It doesn't, as you see. There are pages more of it. Pages. That's what happens to incompetent tale-tellers like me who don't keep the whip hand of their characters and unwarily permit their young people (for instance) to come to an understanding before and not after their material prosperity has been insured.

Well, it can't be helped. I must have an anticlimax, I suppose. Anyhow, I'm not going to leave matters here. You can, of course, do as you please. But I hope you'll persist. There are still a number of things which I should be glad for you to know.

Take Lord Froling's astonishing cheque—It came with the letter he wrote in reply to one from Raymond.

Raymond wrote :

DEAR LORD FROLING,

I am willing to go on with the illustrations if you wish it.

Yours very truly,

R. ADKIN.

Lord Froling, having heartily damned Raymond's impudence, in that he omitted to express any kind

of regret for his behaviour, and having struggled with and vanquished the temptation to send the fellow straightway to the deuce, took Raymond's drawings out of his desk and opened them on his table. For some minutes his eyes browsed upon beauty. Then, "No" he murmured, "I can't let him go. What a line! What a fecundity! That boy's a Master already. What will he be in ten years' time and what will these things be worth? And I'll have forty of them. And *The Bubble!* Can I rob it of them? No, I can't and I won't. These drawings will immortalise it, by God!"

Forthwith he sat himself down and wrote:

MY DEAR MR. ATKINS,

I was very glad to get your letter. Pray go on with the illustrations. We shall, I hope, exhibit them in January at the Albemarle Gallery. I enclose my cheque for twenty-five pounds as an additional advance, and I propose to make you a similar advance upon your future delivery of each tenth drawing. I trust that this will be agreeable to you.

Very sincerely yours,
FROLING.

"That," he thought as he signed the letter, "ought to hold him, if I know anything of artists." He read over what he had written. "Yes," he thought. "Best to ignore that other matter. Much best. Extraordinary coincidence that. Otilie's child, of all people. Well, well! No use carrying on family quarrels longer than is necessary. Let them be. Let them be. If this boy comes off, as I think he will, *one might* even—that is, if they should marry—

330 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

And if he should really come off. However. However." Presently—"Poor dear old Punchester," he said aloud with a giggle as he put the drawing lovingly away, "what a dismal surprise this'll be for him. Yes, I rather flatter myself I've scored off Punchester this time."

Raymond made no difficulty about the proposed alteration in their arrangement. He acknowledged Lord Froling's cheque, cashed it, gave the money to Ottilie, and set to work at once on his next illustration. He had agreed with himself to regard his patron as a source of revenue only. For him Lord Froling was no longer to have any personal aspect at all. For Ottilie too. That was understood.

Ottilie gave the money to Mendoza, because the Spaniard had already put the sum of one hundred pounds to the joint account of herself and Raymond in the Chelsea branch of the North and South Bank. This was their first repayment. Mendoza had, indeed, taken charge of the pair of them.

"You are," he told them, "two very clever little children, but it is clear that you are not yet old enough to look after your two very clever little selves. Only see how you behaved when I was away; one starving herself to death and the other trying to knock his promising career on the head. I did well to come home all of a sudden. Where would you have been if I had not listened to my gloomy presentiment? In the soup, right up to your very clever little necks. It is a nurse you want, a good old nurse to keep you out of mischief. Well, that

good old nurse, do you know who it is going to be? It is going to be the good old Mendoza."

And they might protest themselves black in the face, but that joint credit of a hundred pounds was opened.

Mendoza made it very clear that he was not giving them this money; he understood his Raymond and his Ottilie too well for that. "You shall pay it me back, all, every penny," he said. "In January our clever little Raymond will have four hundred pounds. I do but advance him the quarter, instead of Lord Froling. In January I shall come for my money, never fear. Oh! I shall come for it. But meantime there will be no more living on silly little jugs of milk. After January I do not think there will be any longer need of Mendoza. This old Raymond will then be one of the famous ones and this small Señorita too. Then you shall be as independent as you like. But now it is the thin times. Until the fat times arrive you shall let Mendoza do what *he* likes, otherwise I shall take your old jade magnolia, and chuck it over the bridge, *carrrrramba!*"

II

Punchester came back to London on the last day of August. Almost the first thing he did was to summon Raymond to Queen Anne's Gate. The boy had been let sweat long enough. It was time to bring him to his oats. Not a doubt but he would arrive with a goodly sheaf of book-covers to cash.

332 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

Cash was a thing for which, after a whole month, he must have a considerable amount of use. How many covers would he have to show? Eight? Ten? Twelve?

Raymond went at once, because he perceived that he could no longer postpone breaking his delightful news to his friend. It was a pity. He would much rather have kept the matter of the Froling commission secret until the book should be published. It would be ever so jolly to hand the thing to Punchester all complete. But that was out of the question now. The show had been fixed for the middle of January. Punchester was bound to get wind of it soon. It wouldn't be kind to allow Punchester to hear through some side channel.

He opened Punchester's letter at nine in the morning. By ten he was at Queen Anne's Gate.

When the Righteous Man heard who was below he smiled comfortably. He'd thought as much. His treatment had succeeded to admiration. It always did. Let them sweat and they came to their oats. Inevitably.

He gave Raymond twenty minutes longer and then rang for him to be shown up. Would it be eight or ten?

The discovery that Raymond had no portfolio under his arm gave him quite a disagreeable shock. Nothing? Impossible! Had the fellow, then, left them downstairs? It would be just like him. He *must* have brought something.

Dissembling his anxiety, he stretched out his left hand to his visitor while he affected to peruse a

letter. "Ah, Raymond," he said. "And how are we? Well? Happy? Busy? Take a pew, my boy. Take a pew." He put the letter down. "Now then," he said.

"Mr. Punchester," Raymond began. "I've got a confession to make to you; but I think you'll be pleased."

"Shall I? Splendid. Fire away!" said the Righteous Man and he thought: "Now what the devil is all this?"

"The fact is," said Raymond, "that I've had a rather tremendous stroke of luck."

"Curse it," thought the Righteous Man. "He's come into a legacy. I might have guessed as much."

"Well?" he said, sourly.

Raymond laid the facts before him. Punchester said no word—good or bad, till it was over. He was engaged in settling his policy.

"I'm sorry," said Raymond in conclusion, "that all this work has kept me from doing any more of the book-covers and I'm afraid I shan't be able to do any more for you until January; but after this show's started I shall be able to take them on again; that is, if you want any more. I do hope you don't think me ungrateful; but I don't fancy you'd have wished me to refuse this job when it came my way."

Punchester stood up. "My dear boy," he said. "What an idea! Surely you know me too well for that. I congratulate you with all my heart." He stepped forward, seized Raymond's hand and shook it vigorously. And he thought: "If Froling's putting up a show of these illustrations it means they're

334 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

the stuff. The boy's as good as made, damn it! Confound Froling and Mendoza and all other meddling fools! However, there it is. And now to make the best of it."

"Raymond," he went on, "I always said that you'd arrive. Now here you are, arrived, or as good as. I can't tell you how pleased I am, my dear fellow. And I'll admit that I'm vain enough to rejoice that my own faith in you is going to be so soon justified. Lord Froling may secure the credit of bringing you out, but it will always be a satisfaction to me to reflect that it was I who gave you your first real encouragement."

"Yes," said Raymond. "It's not a thing I'm likely to forget, either."

"I'm sure of it, Raymond, I'm sure of it, my dear boy. But never mind about all that past history. The future is much more important. For doesn't it seem to you that the time has come for us to begin to think rather seriously about that little show that I have been always so anxious to arrange for you? The show of your book-covers, you know. Hitherto the difficulty has been financial. A show by an unknown man costs money. But we may feel fairly sure that by the end of January you will be no longer an unknown man. Since Lord Froling has decided to back you, we may assume, I think, pretty safely, that these illustrations of yours will establish you as an artist with a career before him. It will be quite simple, I believe, to get a gallery to take your book-covers. That is a matter which I will, of course, be only too delighted to undertake.

The trouble is that, so far, we have only about twenty covers. We must have more than that. Forty or fifty at least, eh?" He paused to let these numbers sink in.

"This is dashed good of you," said Raymond. He was still possessed of his illusions with regard to Punchester. Otilie had been content to leave his enlightenment to the future. She had, however, taken certain precautions which will, in a moment be disclosed.

"Not a bit of it, my boy. Not a bit of it. It's what I've been wishing for a long time. But to come back to the question of numbers. Fifty covers we must have, or forty at the very least. That will mean twenty that you will have to do."

"I'm afraid," said Raymond, "I can't undertake any more just at present. I've got all I can manage with Froling's book."

"Quite so. Quite so. I wouldn't for a moment suggest your neglecting that. But by the middle of January you will be free again. Now we don't want to follow up your first show too quickly. If we exhibit the book-covers in May or June it will be quite time enough. But between January and May you can easily do, say, twenty or thirty. Thirty, I think, will be best. Yes. Say thirty more."

"Why," said Raymond, "I expect I could manage that all right."

"Well now, I tell you what," said Punchester. "It's not my custom, as you know, to pay for drawings before I get them; but in this case I should

336 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

like to do so, if you will let me. Ready money never comes amiss to a young artist, I believe. I feel, too, that I owe you something for the pleasure you have given me this morning. One does like to see one's little prophecies come true, eh? And so I'll just write you a cheque for thirty guineas now and you will undertake to deliver the extra thirty book-covers by, say, the last week in April."

He sat down at his table and opened his cheque-book.

Raymond began to blush. "I'm very sorry," he said, "but I can't say Yes to that. Not this morning."

Punchester laid down his pen and stared at Raymond incredulously. "Well, well," he said. "That's very careful of you, of course, but I should have thought that you wouldn't need to reflect very long over this particular bargain, considering the terms are identical with those you have been quite pleased to accept for your covers hitherto. I hope, Raymond, this small prospect of success isn't going to turn your head."

"It isn't that," said Raymond. "I've no quarrel with the terms you've been giving me. But I can't agree to anything more now."

"One of these days," said Punchester slowly, "and possibly not a very distant one, there will be a vacancy on *The Useless*. I've always hoped to put you on to *The Useless*, Raymond. If your show at the Albemarle is a success you will become an artist that *The Useless* may be glad to welcome. But," he paused, "I don't like ingratitude."

"Ingratitude be damned!" said Raymond hotly. "And it's not that I'm sticking out for more money. But I've promised not to make any more bargains with anybody until I've consulted—until I've—what I mean is that I can't bind myself just yet. I have to take somebody's advice first. I've promised."

"Promised?" cried Punchester. "Promised whom?"

Raymond blushed more deeply. "You see, Mr. Punchester," he said; "since I saw you last I've got engaged to be married."

"You have, have you?" said Punchester grimly. "My very best congratulations."

"Thank you," said Raymond. "Well, she's made me promise to consult her always in future about all business matters. And so I must about this one."

"May I ask the name of the young lady?" Punchester inquired politely.

"It's Otilie Wigmore," said Raymond.

"Ah!" said the Righteous Man. "Quite so. Quite."

"It was really she," Raymond went on, "who got me this job from Froling. That is, she put Mendoza on to getting me a job from somebody, and he spoke to Froling about me. She's a little wonder, Mr. Punchester. I expect," he said as he got up, "I'd better go and see what she says about this very jolly proposal of yours."

"Do," said the Righteous Man dully. "Do, my boy. Do. Do."

When Raymond had gone he opened a drawer and

338 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

took from it a large envelope. It had come that morning from Marlow, and it contained the proofs of three drawings which were to appear in the October *Useless*. He had already considered them and judged them. Among them was Otilie's Lady in Bed.

This Punchester laid before him and studied thereafter for several minutes carefully through his magnifying glass, while a frown gathered upon his forehead. His underlip protruded further and further.

Presently he took his telephone and got into communication with his editor. "Marlow," he said, "those pulls you've sent. Two of them I pass, but the Lady in Bed won't do. They must try again. The lines run together in at least seven places."

"Why, Mr. Punchester," said Marlow, at the other end of the wire, "I thought that, considering the minuteness of the work, the pull was extraordinarily good."

"Yes," said Punchester, "but that's not the point, Marlow. The point is that it's not good enough for *The Useless*."

"Well," said Marlow, "they're rather pleased with it themselves. They've taken a lot of trouble over it. I doubt if they'll agree to consider it a failure. They know you can't get it done half as well anywhere else. They'll want more money if they do it again."

"I daresay they will," said Punchester, "and if they do they must have it. What I want is a per-

fect reproduction? do you understand? and I expect you and them to get it for me."

He hung up the receiver and pored again over the proof. "Exquisite," he murmured. "But *not* a nice little girl."

III

After all this talk we have had about the fame and fortune which are to come rushing upon Otilie and Raymond when at last they should make their appearance, it is pleasant to be able to record that this thing did actually happen.

Punchester was again proved to have spotted a winner. Lord Froling's judgment was fully vindicated.

The Lady in Bed made her mark instantly and, long before Raymond's show was held, there was a greater demand for Otilie's drawings than she could supply. She didn't attempt to supply it. She went on exactly as before in her own painstaking fashion, producing little, but that the very best of which she was capable. And since they wanted her work so badly, she saw that they paid her for it. Her prices soared and still they clamoured.

Raymond's show set him instantly on high in the sight of men. I admit that it is astonishing that both my young people should have done so well so quickly, but these things do happen now and then. Nevertheless I am very lucky. Most story-tellers have to be satisfied with one young genius who brings it off the first time.

Yes, Raymond's show did the trick. The papers

340 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

all praised him loudly, and many of the people who make money out of clever young artists began to wonder if they couldn't perhaps make some out of him. And began to try. Otilie saw to it that they didn't make more than was their due.

The South Sea Bubble got (so far as its letter-press went) the worst notices of the season; a few indulgent, it is true, but all quite damning. The mystery which its author had hoped to weave around his personality had no success at all. Not even that could interest the reviewers in the book. They found it simpler to write about the illustrations. Here they were on comfortable ground. Their opinion was unanimous that Mr. Adkin's pictures were superb. H. T. P. headed his article in *The Wigwam* "Why drag in Athelney?" Five thousand copies of the book were sold, but nobody (except Lord Froling) could be found who had read it. Not even Raymond.

In the February number of *The Useless*, the first of Raymond's book-covers appeared, a vacancy having fortunately occurred owing to the untimely death, from pneumonia, during December, of Watts Manciple. The Righteous Man had offered the place to Raymond before Manciple was in his coffin. For by that time Lord Froling had let the Righteous Man see his collection of Adkins.

I find something heroic about Punchester.

When you consider that he was under contract to pay Raymond a hundred and fifty guineas for thirty more book-covers to be delivered by the first of May!

But perhaps he was grateful to Otilie for letting him off so cheap.

IV

On a day early in March, Mendoza stood on the pavement outside his front door staring after a cab that was driving away from him. As it rounded the corner of the street two heads appeared at one of its windows and two handkerchiefs flapped energetically. Mendoza swung his hat. The cab vanished.

The Spaniard turned with a rather pathetic little movement of his shoulders and hands, and slowly re-entered the house. Slowly he climbed his stairs. When he came into the studio Anfitrion was busy clearing away the remains of luncheon. A luncheon for three it had been; a very superb luncheon for three.

Mendoza walked to the fireplace. "Finish up," he said, gently. "I am not going to work." He altered a little the position of a jade magnolia which stood on the mantelpiece.

Anfitrion resumed his activities. He worked very swiftly and as silently as ever he could. Once or twice he slid a glance, charged with devotion and sympathy, in his master's direction. But he said no word.

Mendoza sat down by the fireplace and fixed his eyes on the old high-backed chair which faced him. It was carved with stamped Spanish leather. Mechanically he rolled and lit a cigarette. By the time *he had smoked* it the table was cleared.

342 MENDOZA AND A LITTLE LADY

"Anfitrion," he said, "fill two glasses of champagne. Give me one and take you the other." The man in silence executed these orders and stood expectant.

Mendoza raised his glass. "Drink," he said.

"To whom, señor?"

"To whom, Anfitrion? To whom but the bride? Drink." He emptied his glass and threw it in the grate. Then he got up abruptly and walked to the window.

Anfitrion made him, unseen, a profound reverence. "El Señor Don Luiz Mendoza," he whispered to his wine. Then he drank it out, sent his glass to join Mendoza's and slipped quietly through the door.

THE END.

*A Selection from the
Catalogue of*

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS



**Complete Catalogues sent
on application**

The Man with the Brooding Eyes

By

John Goodwin

Author of "Without Mercy"

A romance full of excitement and surprises, woven around the plots not only of the execrable "Callaghan Gang," who get into their clutches a stenographer who turns out to be an heiress, but of the counter-plots of a devoted lover and clever lawyer, and of a "tall, lean man with brooding eyes," who plays providence in a story in the early part of which he figures as one of the principal villains.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

ew York

London

PRIVILEGE

BY
MICHAEL SADLEIR

"The story of the decline and fall of Whern is always poignant and never dismal. The romance is of the stuff of the story, seen by an author who knows the world we live in. . . . The picture, for all of its rich colour and noble gesture, is essentially true. And it is full of that queer fascination exerted by greatness that is passing or has passed."—*Times Literary Supplement*.

Hamilton Fyfe in the *DAILY MAIL* says:

"About 'Privilege' I find it hard to write without exaggeration. It is so truly imagined, this story of the decline of an ancient family; so skilfully presented, and written with so sure a hand, that we must put its author among the most distinguished not only of our younger but of all our novelists. . . . The entire book is a piece of literature, satisfying from every point of view."

***PUNCH* says:**

"I can imagine few books that would give to some modern Rip van Winkle a better understanding of the attitude of aristocratic youth towards the life of today. . . . A novel both individual and touched with a dignity too rare in these days of slovenly fiction."

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK **LONDON**

The Elephant God

By

Gordon Casserly

There is no elephant in fiction like Badshah."

The Sunday Express.

A thrilling story of adventure and terror in the primeval forest."—*The Times.*

'Badshah is most lovable."

The Times Supplement.

A yarn without a yawn in it."

The Sunday Express.

"A wild orgy of jungle thrills."—*The Chronicle.*

"A wild romance of extraordinary accounts of elephants and jungle."—*The Weekly Dispatch.*

"It is a great and glorious yarn, and I mean to read it all over again."—MR. JAMES DOUGLAS in *The Sunday Express.*

"The whole book is delightful. Major Dermot, the hero, is a splendid man. He is a creation worthy of Kipling."—*The Church Family News.*

"It is difficult to imagine anything more fascinating."—*John o' London's Weekly.*

New York G. P. Putnam's Sons London





